

Lesley Battler | Journal | 1996



Journal archive project

Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

Vol. 16, 1996

Windsor Station cloak-and-dagger – A source reveals top secret plans – So much for the New Global Economy – Lay-offs begin – I receive a job offer – I agree to relocate to Calgary with the CPR – Driving lessons with Gestapo – Home search trip to Calgary – Gothic beginning to a new job – Trip to Michigan – Pre-move visits – CPR “Goodbye Girls” dinner – New friendships and alliances– Boat cruise on the St Lawrence – Moving day – Last days in Montréal – Cab-jacked in Calgary – New house, new office – I resume driving lessons – I finally get my licence – “Restructured” published in *Matrix* magazine – First Christmas in Calgary.

Jan. 3

Talk with Gerry Lafontaine at work. Strange seeing him in his “civilian” clothes, a plain blue turtleneck and tan corduroys. We met in the buffet and talked about all kinds of things. He thinks Véronique is “wacky” and wouldn’t tolerate the way she treats her co-workers for a minute. Then he told me all the secret BIS plans. I feel as if I’ve just seen top-secret military blueprints! Carol and Véronique will be the only ones going to Calgary. Heather, Betty, Ginette and Susan Baumann will all be cut. I couldn’t pretend I was upset at that prospect, especially Susan B. Gerry said, “Aren’t they awful?” My position will be retained but only as it is now, an indefinite contract, so my move will not be paid for by the company and I will not be going to Calgary. So no decision to make. He expects the news about BIS will break on the 22nd.

Jan. 10

A wretched month so far. At work, deep into the last, terminal, stage of restructuring. Everyone quiet, grim, clamped tight. No one comes into the library any more. R&OD are sure they will all be cut. As for Research & Analysis, they seem to be huddled in their bunker waiting for the bombs to drop. The station is like a decaying ducal palace. There are princes and emissaries, like Gerry, the malicious gossips, the court poisoners.

I’ve missed something. Obviously I didn’t absorb all the propaganda about the New Global Economy. When I play my records backwards I somehow keep missing the lyrics “downsizing good, employment bad.” Someone really needs to explain to me how restructuring provides any benefit to the peons directly affected – or the national economy.

Why am I supposed to think of downsizing as a time for new opportunities or developing outside interests? There are no new opportunities unless I can discover my inner computer genius. Outside interests are fine but they don't put bread on the table. Dammit, there goes that electricity I've always wanted, but at least I can now paint a watercolour in the dark!

How do people who can't count on having a job buy houses or cars, take vacations, pay taxes, etc etc, contribute to the national economy? Maybe a few brainwashing sessions will convince me that CEOs deserve their inflated salaries and million dollar bonuses for rooting out deadbeats like me, whose salaries have apparently caused the downfall of western civilization. When will the soul-shrivelled salary-sucking pinheads finish their little rampage?

The view from the trenches is interesting: breakdown in co-worker relationships, new alliances being formed, last minute sucking up, etc etc. Heather is particularly smarmy the way she has been sucking up to Carol and the HR people, but then she has always been opportunistic and a master at looking out for Number One. Véronique seems to hate me now. I think she sees me as competition. I am well-educated and when the library structure is removed I'm in competition with her and Carol, not Elise or Ginette. She won't let me do any work and the others would see me relocated to Alcatraz, the sooner the better. I've never felt so alone in a workplace before and never alienated from my peers like this. I keep my head low, mouth shut and options open.

Jan. 22

I still haven't heard anything official about my job situation. Gerry has been filling me in, but not a word from Carol. Fred thinks Carol knows Gerry is filling me in, and that it's her way of sending out the message and getting me to stay on until fall. All day long the office door opens and closes. Carol and Véronique are always in conference, two generals in their labyrinth; the rest of us irrelevant. News has broken today though. The office door opened. Véronique went in. She and Carol were scrying the Merlin screen and then Véronique exclaimed, "There is a god and he likes me." The door closed again. I'm assuming this means the orcs are officially toast.

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Plock ... plock ... plock ... the water torture continues. It's like being in a room inside a building where there's a carbon monoxide leak. Something insidious sucking all my energy and I have no control over it. Everyone is being poisoned. I'm by no means the only one angry at this excruciating, sadistic treatment of employees. Good talk with Steve Lyons from Archives about corporate sadism. He also has no idea if he has a job, or until when. I like Steve. Out of all the people at CP, he's the one who could most likely be a friend or classmate of mine in real life. He really liked my second Internet article ("Turn of the Century Capitalism") and his compliments made me feel good, but also proud.

We've both been "researching" the careers section in the Globe and Mail and have noticed the only jobs available are in Information Technology – and for directors. Hundreds of job ads for directors. Steve said it was so they wouldn't have to move their fat asses too far to switch chairs. The qualifications for being a director seem to be a nebulous advanced degree and a previous position as a director.

Gordon Mitchell came in. He's in HR and they don't know what's going on. This is one of the departments (the other is Computers+Communications Toronto) who is rebelling against relocating to Calgary. Gordon is also angry and thinks this is a sadistic way to treat people. I said I wish they would just pink-slip me so I could get on with my life. If I quit I can't collect unemployment insurance. I know news broke yesterday but Carol and Véronique are both so secretive and focused on their own careers. They have no interest in any of the rest of us whatsoever.

Feb. 5

Office door closed most of the morning. Carol and Véronique being very cloak-and-dagger. Door opens. Betty enters office. Door closes. Door opens again. Betty leaves. She has been laid off and today is her last day! She spends her last day blatantly reading the newspaper comics and talking to her buddies in the station, as I would, as anyone would. Office door closes then opens again. Susan Baumann puts her coat on and leaves immediately without saying goodbye to anyone.

Afternoon meeting to divide up Betty's duties. Elise is being stuck with them. Later Ginette came up to me and launched into a tirade about how loyal Elise is and how they are shunting all of this work on her. The implication was that I was somehow to blame and had emerged scot-free. Ginette does one job; I have had way too much work to do since I arrived at CP. But I kept quiet and listened, knowing that I only have a stay of execution for a few months.

Feb. 12

Heather and Ginette laid off. Elise's ordering service cancelled. She is, of course, very upset and still clinging as tightly as she can to CP. She still thinks she will be going to Calgary and is arranging for a loan with her father so she can go. I have my job until fall. I haven't lost any of my usual work and have picked up Betty's transcript distribution. Business Information Services will be moving to Calgary. Only Carol, Véronique and my positions will be going. My position will be cut to part-time so I don't even have to think about Calgary. When Carol mentioned the fate of my job Elise asked if she could apply for it. There were beads of sweat on her forehead. We all said yes. I said I couldn't move to Calgary for a part-time job and I was bowing out in the fall.

Wilson Pak and Greg Rosval were laid off and they are waiting for official letters. The entire Research and Development group has been decimated. This was one of my favourite client groups and I cried after hearing the news from Wilson at lunch.

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Carol sent out a broadcast announcing the cancellation of the library's centralized subscription and book ordering services – Elise's job. We had visitors all day, including Mike Di Mambro, Diane Normand, Wilson Pak, Tom Machnikowski.

Feb. 22

Another day. Margo, who has worked for CP since she was eighteen is being laid off at the end of the month. Feels like there is a sniper sitting in the rafters picking off people one at a time. The BIS office is dimly lit, a gloomy little outpost, forgotten by the crumbling empire which put it into place. Véronique's Louis XIV act is getting on my nerves and so is Carol's cronyism. Elise has fallen to pieces since her ordering business was cancelled. Véronique has been particularly harsh with her lately. Elise, Julie and I talked about this at lunch today. Julie is perceptive. She's noticed the atmosphere here these days, has trouble sleeping, hates coming to her CP job. She's also noticed that all the people who were fired are all people who complained to Carol about Véronique.

Around 3:30 in the afternoon, while the whole room seemed to be growing dimmer by the second, Ralph Wilson from Corporate Communications and Public Affairs called and asked if I could see him upstairs. I went, only too glad to leave the dungeon. He and Dave Jones ushered me into a conference room to offer me a job with their department: Corporate Writer and working with Dave Jones on *the CP Rail News*. "You have a Master's degree in English and we know you can write," said Ralph. Dave mentioned his degree in history and Ralph's degree is in philosophy. It is a full-time, permanent professional job with benefits. I'd be starting at a higher salary than I could work up to in BIS. The job is located in the Gulf Canada Square building. In Calgary.

Ralph Wilson looks a lot like Martin Mull. He's glib, a bit of a huckster. He seems to take corporate communications very seriously and mentioned several times during the meeting that the VPs don't support communications the way they should, confirming my belief that all groups feel misunderstood and beleaguered even if they are the ones in power. If he wants to see devalued work, he should come downstairs to BIS, or talk to someone from Operations.

The rest of the meeting was a blur. I had already turned Carol down twice about relocating to Calgary with BIS and said I was sure I could get another library job in Montréal. I was not expecting this. Gerry kept this part under his hat. This isn't returning back up the hill to McGill cap in hand. This is the kind of job I will never be able to get in Montréal with my wobbly French.

I eventually reeled out of the room. It's as if the gods of restructuring had nothing to do today and decided to zap the first person to appear on the concourse. I had no clue this was even a possibility. Gerry certainly kept this under his hat. But whether or not I'm one of the lucky ones, this whole restructuring process has been sadistic and arbitrary. To keep so many people on hold for so long. Why, when things happen in this company do they have to come as such a shock. Could no one have told me, even hinted I might have a chance in Corporate Communications? Carol must have passed my CV to Ralph without saying a word about it to me. I got this job because of my Internet article, the one that won an award for the *CP Rail News*. So here it is: I got a job I didn't apply for because of an article I didn't submit to the News (Carol must have done it) which won an award I never knew existed. I'm going to Calgary because of this. I'm going to be part of the largest corporate relocation in Canadian history. I'm going to Calgary. Stop.

When I returned to BIS all I could say to Carol and Véronique was "holy shit" and that I had to go for a break. I ended up pouring out the whole story to the young woman behind the counter at Treats. She was the first person to hear the news. Then I returned to the office and called Fred, opening the call by singing the first line of "Bonanza." When I left the station and descended into the long Bonaventure tunnel a busker was playing "the times they are a'changin'."

But ... Calgary. Shit. Land of Stetsons, where line dancing is mandatory, you have to eat beef all the time, the museums are run by pig farmers, your pick-up has to contain at least one gun rack, speeches by Ralph Klein and Preston Manning are broadcast day and night, Tim Horton's is gourmet coffee, an old building dates from 1964, I'll have to unlearn the metric system. Worst of all, instead of being within travelling distance of Maine and the ocean I'll be next door to Montana, the militia boys and the Aryan Nations.

Feb. 26

Went upstairs to deliver something to Dave Jones, my new colleague, in my new department. On my way back to BIS I ran into Malcolm Cairns. He was on his way out of the library and told me he wondered if I had lost my job. Actually, true to CP Rail protocol he never finished the sentence. He said, "I wondered if you had ...". No one at CP ever finishes that sentence. It is always assumed understood between CP employees. Most CP conversations of any sort end up in ellipses. In this strange corporate wonderland you never know where the professional/personal boundary line lies.

Since I'm still walking around with a stunned look on my face, he asked, "Is it bad?" I told him about the job offer and it meant relocating to Calgary. He asked if I was going to take it and I said I couldn't refuse, it was something new, it was my ticket to a new career without having to retrain or return to school. He said, "Of course you can't. It's a permanent job." He was very happy for me, congratulated me and then said, "That means you won't be working in the library any more."

Later, Laurie and Isabel were on the BIS Internet checking out such renowned business sites as DeathNet and the Groove Kings's homepages. Malcolm Cairns returned and while checking out his books we had yet another one of our surreal conversations. I said I hadn't realized how devalued library, research and information work really was until I saw the salary scale for my new job. He said, "Didn't you know that?" I said I knew it in theory but never saw dollar figures before. He said he made a "ridiculously high salary" and all the social services, looking after children, etc, were devalued. He has some surprising, refreshing opinions. He then added that very few people can do what he does. We switched back to the library and he said that unlike others he got his own information and that was the way it should be. I can't dislike a man who actually admits he makes a ridiculously high salary.

March 1

Fred went to BIS to do some research for a collections development project. I missed quite the day. Ralph Wilson came in looking for me and Fred got to meet him. I'm glad. It somehow makes the offer seem more real. While Fred was in my office Gregory Izbinsky, a Research & Operations guy who lost his job, brought me a lovely pink rose, and Fred was brought it home for me. A card was included, which said, "To Lesley, the warmest heart in the company – Gregory Izbinsky."

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Went to see *Angels and Insects* to try getting my mind off Calgary. I enjoyed it. William Adamson is a naturalist fresh from the Amazon, who discovers a more sinister jungle when he becomes embroiled with the Alabaster clan. The well-meaning but feckless patriarch hires Adamson to sort out his own collection of insects. The patriarch's son and heir is a boorish rapacious drunk while Eugenia, the daughter who looks like an aging Heidi, pines away after a failed romance. Adamson's research reflects the Alabaster's overprivileged and useless lives. Heirs and servants alike hover around a mother who looks like a three year-old pastry. She is obviously the queen ant in the colony. Even the picnic outings are composed like museum dioramas. It's the servants and Darwin who finally rescue Adamson from the creepy Alabasters. Science and free will win out over determinism, a message I am always up for.

The incest scene is very well done, the rot buried in this society, what naturally appears when rocks are overturned. Far from sensationalism, the film and its scientific conceit make the incest scene the logical, inevitable, discovery. The bed where it takes place looks like gauze, a chrysalis or cocoon. The best scenes have a dark daft Svankmajer quality. It's a mixture of Svankmajer and a Merchant-Ivory period piece, Victorian tableaux with Svankmajer creepiness in them.

March 4

Some happy news breaking in the station. Stephanie Tran, another indefinite contract employee, got a permanent job with IFS (Intermodal Freight Service) based in Mississauga. Andrew Acs from Research & Analysis is also moving to Mississauga, but he's moving in a week from now. He heard all about my news from Ken McGuire. Said Ken told him he had seen me right after I got the news and I was white. Andrew joined CP about the same time I did and he also finds it a rollercoaster. He found out he got the job when he was in Québec City, on the very day he was moving to BC. Richard Emmer called and he came here. Now Andrew's once again in the middle of moving preparations, can't relax on weekends, feels there's always more packing to do. He's happy to have a new job in Commercial, says Mississauga is all right and he was not ready for Calgary.

I find these stories fascinating. Richard Emmer once said the move to Calgary was a social experiment. It's as if we're all now migrants and I picture caravans on the highways, a yellow caravan of Rider trucks on the Transcanada this summer, CP Rail Okies adrift on the prairies. Andrew is moving and is in a state of manic excitement verging on panic. Meanwhile Margo is in the concourse saying goodbye to her friends and eighteen years at CP. The highs and lows are coming no longer as waves but at the same time.

It doesn't feel as if I have a job with the same company. The Gulf Canada Square building in Calgary is nothing like the station and all of the propaganda (which I guess I'll be writing soon) is about the "new CP," the new business as opposed to the old; old guard vs new. It seems that the younger well-educated people are being kept on. This is where I come in, I guess. But what happens when companies cut all of the people who are different, who don't quite fit into the corporate image? CP is full of eccentrics. What will happen to it when the eccentrics, the characters, the long-time loyalists are all purged? Probably more uniformity, conformity, competition. Less humanity to leaven a workday.

Fred and I haven't agreed on much lately, but we do agree I have to take this job. He said, "If you don't take it I'll be very angry with you." I resent his tone. Never mind that many people, especially women, are turning down jobs in Calgary because of their families and relationships. It involves moving thousands of miles to a city that has never interested me and where I don't know anyone. I have to give up the house I love, Maine, friends who are my lifeblood. But he'd be very angry if I couldn't go through with it.

March 5

Called Terry Byrnes to see if he would give me a reference – if I should need one. At this point I don't even know if I need to submit an official CV. Ralph hasn't requested one. I asked Carol and she said she thought it was a done deal. When I asked Terry about the reference he was taken off-guard, I think, because he immediately said "any time" without asking what it was for. I told him my CP news; promotion, Calgary, salary and he said, "Well I'll be damned." Then he said, "Welcome to the middle class, Lesley."

He then asked about my writing, drawing the crab shell over any spontaneity he might have revealed. I told him the truth, I had been preoccupied with work and hadn't found time to revise my work to send it out. He asked about the thesis and then urged me to send it to Karen Haughian at Nu-Age. I was too proud to admit that I had sent it to her two years ago after calling her about it and I never received a response, not even a rejection letter. He hroomed and boomed at me for a while and then said, "Your writing is more accomplished than a lot that's coming out now."

He then said I should send the thesis off to publishers before I was hit with the psychological impact of moving to Calgary. I didn't tell him I'm not interested in the thesis any more and that's the main reason I haven't done anything with it. Dances with thesis advisors. I am touched by his "any time" response and how he managed to pinpoint the whole situation in three phrases: "well I'll be damned," "welcome to the middle class" and "the psychological impact of moving to Calgary."

March 11

A gorgeous sunny day but you'd never know it in my office where there is no light, no time, no weather. Radio silence. No one from the outside world enters any more. Elise, Julie and I are all fed up with Véronique. Then Dave Jones called and invited me to lunch. Carol told me it was fine but then asked me to get Elise to cover the desk for me. This made me mad. Elise's main job was cancelled, Véronique is treating her like shit and she resents having to take the desk. I don't blame her in the slightest for that. And ... no one is coming in. There is no need for anyone to be there any more.

Carol has an imperious streak to her and she doesn't like to get her hands dirty. I don't feel it's my place to ask Elise to replace me as if this is some kind of personal favour. Carol is paid managerial bucks and I'm tired of her sloughing off anything that is difficult or managerial. So, calm cool collected me, I said out loud. "I don't care who takes the desk. No one is coming in. Why is this my problem. I don't care. I'm leaving anyway." Carol took the outburst quite well. She merely said I should care but that was all and Elise did end up taking my place.

I finally escaped BIS, blinking as if I hadn't see daylight in a long time. Went to lunch with Dave Jones and David King of Litho Associates. David King is a lovely man, kind, gracious, a youthful face with "blue eyes full of light." We did lunch at the Cracovie and I admit to glancing out the window hoping someone I know would see me having a proper business lunch. We went to David King's printing company where I was given the grand tour. I saw how the *CP Rail News* was pasted up, saw the new issue coming off the press, pummelled and pumiced by rollers.

I'm not sure what to make of Dave Jones. He certainly doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve and has one of those unreadable faces. Light salt and pepper beard, two sharp grooves between his slate-grey eyes. His eyes are like blades and seems very much an observer. He is very stylish, cool on all levels and lives in an apartment in the Plateau. He loves the city and I don't think he wants to move to Calgary. All day long he described the move as overwhelming. But it was a pleasant way to spend a workday.

While I was out Malcolm Cairns came into BIS and asked Elise about me, how I was doing. He also asked if I had an MA or a PhD. There's a rumour in his department that I have a PhD but he knew better of course. I wonder if they took bets.

March 17

Went to Cynthia's surprise bridal shower, held by Diane Coull, Matthew's sister. Everyone was gathered in the living room. Cynthia, Matthew and her sister Caroline came in from the St Patrick's Day parade and were tired and cranky. Cyn was less than delighted with the surprise. She made a few polite rounds then retreated to a corner of the dining room. Matthew was much more enthusiastic and wanted to stay.

Cynthia's longtime friend Jennifer was there. I do admire her bright originality, her personal flair and extraversion. She works very hard on her image. I heard her tell someone that Cynthia has always been much more reserved and Jennifer has always been the social one. From the tone of her voice I got the impression this has been a long-standing issue for them. Even though I'm old now and can see the insecurity in Jennifer, she still intimidates me with her popularity and also her mastery of all things "feminine." She's now writing a novel about two old friends.

Cynthia loved the medieval princess candle I found for her at the Medieval Store – where else? Cynthia's Aunt Kathleen was very kind and supportive about my move to Calgary.

March 20

Elise was laid off. She is devastated. She was convinced she would be staying at BIS until autumn at least and still hadn't given up on applying for my job and moving to Calgary. She had arranged a loan from her father. She won't let go though, said she's coming back two days a week and charging the department. She's also talking about visiting her aunt and uncle in Calgary. Should I warn Carol? What happens if an employee doesn't stop coming into work after she's been laid off? Meanwhile ... I filled in my relocation form and submitted it to VP David Flicker.

It seems both Elise and my lives have been turned upside-down. I feel like a scumbag. This whole reorg has done nothing but pit employee against employee. The losers are unemployed but the winners feel like scumbags, or cuckoos pushing people out of their jobs. I keep telling myself that this is not my fault. I am qualified for the job. I did not get it because I was pals with Carol, sucked up to anyone, gossiped or backstabbed. There is no reason for me to feel guilty about this. The job description requires a degree in English. I have two degrees in English. Elise wouldn't get this job no matter what. That's all there is to it.

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Relocation request approved by VP Flicker. That was fast.

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Wilson Pak has a new job with a railway supplier and will be moving to Chicago with an April 1 start date. It feels like the last day of university when everyone is heading off, moving in all directions. What a short time we all had together and now we're off to start new lives.

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Jim Scott, an engineer who was laid off several months ago, came into BIS. He's a good friend of Jack Cline – I saw them together at the computer show. He heard the bad news about Elise. While I was talking to Jim, Carol kept hovering in the background, anxious about what I was saying to him. In fact, she tried to censor me by telling me what I should say about BIS to our clients. I told her Jim was a good friend of Jack Cline's. Jack Cline was one of Elise's special clients and it was appropriate to express grief and solidarity over Elise. To do anything else would make it look as if BIS was heartless. It's all about relationships you form and the dynamics created by these relationships. And here at CP they can be surprisingly close and loyal. Deep-rooted. Carol admitted I was right.

I also know Jim Scott. We've talked about politics, the economy, downsizing, etc, etc. I've also run into him in the West Island Canadian Tire. He is one of the most decent people I've met at CP and if I had toed Carol's party line he would have been suspicious.

April 24

Big wet Christmassy snow. Went to the SAAQ for my theory exam, first step toward getting a driver's license. Passing the theory exam entitles me to a learner's permit. The SAAQ was disorienting. A bureaucrat ushered me into a waiting room where everyone looked as if they had just stepped out of a cargo hold. I was sent from wicket to wicket and given a brief eye test for direct and peripheral vision. I had no idea what I was doing, just shunted from wicket to wicket. Finally sent into the exam room, which looked like a scene from *1984*, presided over by yet another bureaucrat. A close dark room banked with computers, grim silence punctuated by moans and groans, the occasional "oh shit."

The language used, in both the driver's manual and on the computer tests, is vague, seemingly designed to obscure. The SAAQ exam was even worse. I was stymied by the terminology; the language seemed to strangle the questions and fairly simple concepts. The fuzzy computer images didn't help. Anyway, I flunked my theory exam. In fact, I flunked the section on highway signs and markings, which is the easiest section. I had consistently done best on it on the practice tests at the Montréal City Driving School.

It was humiliating. All around me the oppressed masses from the waiting room were jubilant while I slunk into the loser's lineup, another round of wickets, more bureaucrats handing out brochures that said, "You can be a safe driver." Worst of all, I left the SAAQ and saw all the pinheads out there in cars breaking laws left, right and centre. All I could think for the rest of the day was, "*That* guy passed a theory test."

Fred's day was worse though. I dreaded telling him I flunked the exam, figuring he would accuse me of flunking on purpose or not studying. I'm not interested in driving and am only getting the license because he is pushing hard for it. Calgary is a completely different city than Montréal, very spread out and driving may be necessary there. But as it turned out, he received a letter from the VP of Grad Studies. He and his group in the Management course they were taking were slapped with plagiarism charges. We're a real pair today: the imbecile and the plagiarist.

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Fred and I went to see *Fargo*. A typical Coen Brothers movie; very wide, high, unusual camera angles where people are turned into monuments or tiny specks dominated by landscape. Characters who all come to grisly and buffoonish ends. Best line went to the pregnant cop who found a leg sticking out of a wood-chipper. She said, deadpan, "That's your accomplice in the wood-chipper." Full of irony, black humour and gorgeous photography.

The neon of the Crazy 8 nightclub in snow. Interior like stale chocolate, deserted aquarium of pool tables. On a screen, baseball players moving silently as fish, their deep waterworld exposed to the world, yet watched by no one. Trees netted with snow. Fine mesh chain link, barbed wire fences; the terra incognita of the Interstate. Buildings as ancient artifacts.

May 31

Stopped in at Howard Ross to meet Gail. Has Jane ever changed her appearance! She was wearing her hair curled around her ears and it was rinsed blond. Her lovely grey eyes were accentuated. She was also dressed in a much softer, more creative style. Gail talked me into going to a rally protesting voter fraud during the Referendum. A good-sized crowd billowed around the Hydro-Québec building where Pierre Cote has his office. Gail is passionate about her beliefs. She was clapping, raising her arms, shouting, “Don’t mess with my vote” with true conviction. Many old people were there and I got to meet Gail’s mother, who loves to kiss and laughs just like Gail. Some of the protest signs were good like, “Bienvenues les ethniques.” And of course the usual professional anglos staked out the fringes with their “Loi 101=Swastika signs – the reason why I didn’t feel like going. It seemed many were mostly people-watching and enjoying the sunshine, which is pretty much what I was doing. I think Gail was the most fervent person there.

Met up with Ravil and Maria from McLennan ILL. Gail and Ravil are going through a terrible time right now. Ravil is out of work, is searching high and low for a job and is ashamed to be seen by anyone from McGill. They are so broke they couldn’t afford to go to Cynthia’s wedding.

Also ran into Iro and Brenda from Serials. Iro is ageless. I tapped Brenda on the shoulder and said, “What’s up doc.” I really do like her and I think she’s fond of me too. She told me I had to come back to Technical Services and visit before I left for Calgary. Finished off my lovely leisurely afternoon, my last free Friday, at Concordia. There’s a Tim Hortons with a quiet outdoor terrasse that feels like a secluded little courtyard in the middle of the city.

June 1

Cynthia and Matthew’s wedding. It was held at St Mary’s church in Greenfield Park, a pleasant, modern Catholic church. The ceremony started with *Pachelbel’s Canon* played by a student chamber orchestra. Cyn’s sister Caroline was maid of honour and a very pregnant Jennifer Innes was bridesmaid. Jennifer looked like a 1940s movie star in her lustrous dark green dress, choker of pearls around her neck.

She radiates star quality, an old-fashioned glamorous charisma. I wish I could be like her for one evening, just to experience what it's like to have personal charisma. Matthew looked very touching in his tux. He greeted everyone and thanked them for coming with utter sincerity and gratitude his eyes full of hope and happiness. Cynthia wore a regal white dress with long white sleevelets and looked like a medieval princess. Her makeup brought out something proud and indomitable in her nature. Even a little fierceness. The pixie transformed to medieval queen.

It was a lovely, uncluttered service but I could see Cynthia's respect for tradition. She's always said she was traditional and the wedding reflected that without being stuffy or cloying. There was a candle-lighting ritual in the middle of the ceremony. Everyone walked down the church aisle to greet Cyn and Matthew and were given candles, which were then lit so everyone could share in the light of their love. This was beautiful.

June 2

Went to Cyn and Matthew's open house. To me Cynthia looks most beautiful to me exactly as she was today, a loose dress, straight shining hair tucked behind her ears. She is beautiful in a deeper more understated way than Jennifer. Her features are fine and strong, what Margaret Atwood would call "good bones."

Very pleasant conversation with Cynthia's mother, Elsie. We talked about the move to Calgary and her face lit up when she talked about the adventure of it. I'm not sure how we started this conversation but she told me how much she loves to do domestic things. She was brought up by housekeepers and never learned to sew, cook, garden, etc as a child. But she loves doing these things now. And she's passed that love on to Cynthia.

June 4

Fred and I arrived in Calgary. Finally seeing this place firsthand. The city exists. This is all real. After landing we went to Thrifty to pick up the rental car, which was arranged by Rider. Turned out we were assigned a deluxe stretch beast van. As usual these days I just nod and smile.

We were also assigned a pleasant suite in the Royal George Suites right downtown. I had expected a room in the Olympic Village, which is well out of town. But this is downtown and it's the size of a nice one bedroom apartment. A van and hotel suite provided by a company. I still can't get over it. The Royal George was filled with elderly Brits, part of the International Rotarian Convention in the city, so instead of Stetsons I was surrounded by British accents. They were a jolly group though, and for some strange reason I found it oddly appropriate. Outside the window – mountains! The Rockies, a ghost impression in the distance. The most delicate needlepoint of white against a robin's-egg blue sky. An eerie world's-end feeling.

**

Office buildings in downtown Calgary are connected by above-ground passages called “plus fives.” There's a pedestrian walkway and enough Second Cups to lull me into feeling I haven't gone any farther than Ottawa. The impression doesn't last long. Calgary's downtown is very compact consisting of head office towers squeezed together with nothing to dilute them. These buildings are all brand new. There is no juxtaposition of old and new. There is nothing old here. On the other hand, the office towers are rather attractive. I guess the really ugly concrete communist buildings from the 1960s and 70s were torn down and replaced by 80s po-mo. A lot of glass and reflections everywhere.

It's strange not seeing anything old, the crumbling brick, curling facades, stone saints, brick and wood worn to parchment, back alleys steaming with detritus. Here there are only glass rectangles. No history, no texture, none of the layers or smells of age. No smells at all. It's kind of a pod city, something space aliens might set up to reproduce a human city. The mountains give an end-of-the-world feeling to everything. Also strange: instead of Montréal-NY-Boston, here it's Calgary-Seattle-Dallas. The geography is completely unfamiliar.

**

Went over to the Gulf Canada Square building to check out the new CP offices. This isn't Windsor Station any more, Toto! Instead of a statue of George Stephen or an angel carrying a serviceman to heaven, there's an old orange oil pump in pride of place.

I won't see exclusively CP Rail people here. The era of insularity is over. CP will become a company like any other and whatever camaraderie there was left in the station will disappear, diffused by the other companies housed here, the boutiques, banks, coffee shops all connected by the Plus Fives. Went up to the 20th floor where BIS and Corporate Communications are supposed to be but it's still a construction zone.

On the 19th floor some people are already working in the office. Their names are printed on pieces of paper attached to tiny workstations. I hope they help prevent people from getting lost. I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to find my way through this labyrinth. The new offices have been designed in an "open concept." The propaganda says this type of design is supposed to facilitate team-work, cooperation and the removal of old style hierarchy and secrecy. Big dividers have been replaced by short dividers so there is no privacy. These offices are actually panopticons, where all employees can be seen by senior managers, who are the only ones who have glass-walled offices with doors. I can more easily see a murder waiting to happen than team-work and cooperation, especially if you end up beside a Susan Baumann.

This is not going to be a rebellious group of people. No one moving to Calgary from Montréal is going to ask too many questions or rock the boat in any way. They will be just trying to get their bearings. Relocating employees pretty much guarantees their conformity. My new job is still a complete mystery. My first day in Rm 135 has made nothing clearer to me. Being located at the Gulf Canada building will be like working at a new company. Nothing connects the building to CP Rail or the past. It will be a new job with a new company only sprinkled with some familiar faces. The levels of strangeness about this situation just don't end.

**

Greg Gunhold of ReMax picked us up at the hotel to begin our tour of Calgary and home search. I have liked him since I first called him back in March or April. There's something a little flamboyant, a little gay about him, which suits me just fine. He's a chameleon. His patter is, of course, designed to sell but for some reason I never felt I was stuck with some marketing and sales guy. He was genuinely friendly; excellent company.

Calgary is a surprising place. The houses remind me of the tiny bungalows we saw when we visited Fred's cousins in California. No brick and stone. All stucco with some vinyl. Instead of driveways in the front they are all in the back. Every house has a gravel alleyway (the size of small roads) behind it and I think in theory you enter through the back. Quite a few resemblances to California and other states. Vintage cars everywhere. Greg says it's because Calgary has a much dryer climate than what I'm used to and they don't use much salt in the winter.

Calgary is always promoted as a magnet for healthy young athletic people. but the people I see drive beat up cars and pick-up trucks with Reform license plates. Same mixture of trendy gentrification with hard-core old-timey conservative Alberta. This is a lot like Burlington, Vermont and California as well. The bedrock conservatism shows up in a lot of the houses, which seem to have been untouched since the 1960s or 70s. They may bulldoze any building over twenty years old but they don't change their houses.

I picked the right agent, though. Maybe all Greg did was reflect our own impressions back to us but he did it with wit, intelligence and style. He was far more urbane than any other real estate agent I have ever encountered. We cracked jokes about Calgary stereotypes – lots of beef jokes. His refrain was, "What's going on with that?" The tour accomplished its purpose. We can see Calgary is completely different from both Montréal and Ontario; the West is a socio-political-geographic state. We came to an intersection and pulled up beside a car where a woman in a pick suit was reading a book at the traffic lights. She turned out to be Greg's "dragon lady" ex-wife. This evoked a lot of jokes about Calgary being a small town. More Rotarians in the Royal George Hotel; perky old people in running shoes and fanny packs, following us around out our strange "business trip" like a British chorus.

**

Explored Eau Claire, which seems strangely isolated, segregated from the city. Brightly coloured faux Santa Fe decor but it looked more like a seasonal market than an permanent, integral part of the city. After this, we went for a drive in the Ramsay area. So far the most interesting area of the city and I'm assuming way beyond our price range.

It's the strangest feeling to come into a city as tourists but looking around with an eye as to what we could possibly want to own. This area seems to be on the verge of gentrification. Greg said it's been on this edge for ten years now. Here you find big infill house, which I have learned is property bought for the sole purpose of building a house, so you end up entirely with house and no lot. Some of the houses look like the framed Victorian houses in San Francisco but right beside one of these will be a tiny stucco doll's house. There is much more variety and quirkiness, little eccentricities I love in neighbourhoods. Lots of trees as well. According to Greg, Calgarians planted a lot of poplars, which grow like weeds. The poplars shot up and then the elms, birches and evergreens had a chance to take root and so there are trees in Calgary. This area of the city fans out into a hinterland of railcars and old grain feed co-ops. You move pretty fast from San Francisco to prairie town.

**

Although we only had our tour of the city today, and haven't actually started the home-search yet, I'm exhausted and very, very dry. It gets hot here around five pm, the sun gaining strength throughout the day, and it is always right in your face. It is inescapable. The light doesn't begin waning until ten at night and it's only early June. The difference in climate is exhausting. Joked with Greg about being wimpy easterners, guzzling water, brandishing bottles of eye drops, holding our noses to keep them from bleeding. At the end of the tour I sat in the bathroom with a wet towel over my face.

Went to Il Teatro for dinner, a gorgeous Italian restaurant in a renovated bank building downtown near the city hall. High ceilings, marble floors and they had left the wooden counters and iron doorways as decor. Earlier, Greg had warned us that Calgarians are very trendy. Fred wanted a white Zinfandel. The sommelier told us white Zinfandel was passé. Paris, San Francisco, Montréal – but we're too passé for Calgary.

June 6

House hunting began in earnest. Greg had done his research, selected only houses in our price range (I was adamant about not going over what we paid for our Dorval house) and specific areas of the city. He also caught on very quickly as to how we felt about the various houses and made hilarious comments, which, not coincidentally, reflected our own opinions.

Very discouraging at first. The houses are so different from Montréal. They are all bungalows or semi-split levels. Many look like stucco train containers with slit windows. A huge preponderance of brown. And then there were the interiors. More brown, fake wood panelling, bilious green/orange/beige carpeting. It took a while to realize I simply wouldn't find a Cape Cod cottage here and I had to look at houses in terms of Calgary and not Montréal. I grew more and more depressed as the day went on. I couldn't imagine wanting to do anything except commit suicide in any of these houses.

But Greg had again sounded my mood and said he and Sandra (his wife, Sandra Melnik) find there is always a point where you hit the wall, where nothing about the new place equals the old. As he predicted, my thinking started to change. I became better able to see the houses in context of Calgary. I also set a very strict financial bar, which limited the style and quality of the houses. I could not commit to spending any more on a city I didn't know, a job I hadn't started. By the end of the day we did end up with a short list of houses, again just as Greg had predicted. He really knows his business and my esteem for real estate agents has skyrocketed.

Santa Fe house: Decorated in a Santa Fe style. It had the best kitchen and the basement wasn't unpleasant. The children's playroom would make a gorgeous workroom. Nothing else about it was special, but those two rooms were very good.

The Gunrack House: A split-level with Tudorish beams, resembled a Strasbourg house. Also hidden behind gorgeous evergreens. Nice kitchen and bathroom. We called it the Gunrack House because there was a gun cabinet in the basement and a rack of fierce-looking hunting knives on the wall right beside the bed. "Yikes," said Greg. "I don't want to know what these people do in their bedroom."

We did end up eliminating this house. Later in the evening we went back and cruised the gravel alleyway behind the house. In the shed right next door were three men with tattoos and Harleys. I'm going to be alone for a year and I just don't need this.

Midnapore House: Greg took us to view a house in the outlying suburb of Midnapore just to show us what might be available if we went further afield. Midnapore used to be a small town, one of the older areas annexed by Calgary. I really liked the house. It looked homey and cottagey, the rugs were striped and the hardwood floors beautiful. In the end I decided transit was too much for me. Although a smaller city than Montréal in population, Calgary is geographically huge, and a car town.

The Jacuzzi House: This house was a problem for me. It had some features that were impossible to overlook. A stone fireplace, a satellite dish that could pick up CFNY and a dream bathroom, huge with a thronelike Jacuzzi. There was something a little eerie about it though. The lighting was muted and it made me think of a secret room on the *X-Files* containing an alien experiment. The yard was also beautiful, a canopy of lilac bushes. A sense of privacy and wildness that I love. But the house disturbed me. It had bad vibes. The bedrooms were tiny, overstuffed and I got that same *X-Files* feeling. There was also this layer of smells – not necessarily bad, just heavy. Too much past, too many heavy feelings, layers of accumulated baggage. I couldn't imagine living there alone. Compelling and disturbing.

June 7

Today's tour. First house was quite different. The upstairs was reconstituted harvest gold, piss green, suicide brown. But the basement was gorgeous, painted white with French doors leading into a beautiful master bedroom and bathroom (another Jacuzzi). The basement window had been enlarged. Such a complete reversal of the upstairs/downstairs orientation I wasn't sure if I would adjust to it or if I'd end up feeling like a vampire, descending to my lair in the basement to sleep, eat, watch TV etc.

A few other houses passed in a blur then we viewed a bungalow on Fairview Crescent. The first thing I noticed was the huge picture window and pleasant shades of pale green and blue. No carpets, all gleaming hardwood floors and large bedrooms.

So many bungalows have developed kitchen living/dining areas with three small rooms crowded down a hall that looks like an office corridor. But this bungalow was laid out in a square, more like King Edward and there's a little privacy and charm about it. But the best part is when I walked into the house I felt good. Sense of space and light, a house made for new beginnings, clean, neat, light, impression of spaciousness, not a box closed in around someone else's past.

Two houses left on the tour. One was a strange pastiche of styles and reminded me of a crumbling Spanish villa. The last house was fairly nice but I was burnt out at that point. We went back to look at the Santa Fe, the Jazuzzi House and the Vampire Basement House one last time. Fred was partial to the Vampire Basement but we decided to buy the house on Fairview. This isn't love, not the way the house in Dorval is. Fairview is pleasant, manageable. I can live in this house alone without feeling overwhelmed or creeped out. It has good vibes. Fred can live with it as well although he really did like the basement house better. That house was considerably more expensive and would have required a lot of work to get the upstairs looking half as nice as the basement. This tipped the balance to Fairview.

We made an offer to purchase it, presided over by our guardian angels, Greg and Sandra. We are buying a house in Calgary for 119,000, the same as what we paid for in Dorval. It feels as if I went out and did exactly what I came to do right on budget. This means I won't need the CP housing subsidy. If things don't work out I can sell the house and leave without being bound to the company. Greg said he enjoyed dealing with us because I was straight with him and we were "real troopers."

**

Friday night at the Royal George. No street-life like Montréal. No jumble of cars and pedestrians, no mobile construction units or foxholes à la rue Stanley. Only loud cars, pick-up trucks and a couple of drunks shouting at each other. Pretty much the same as Dunlop Street in Barrie.

As for Fred: I don't know how he feels. I don't know if he has any intention of every coming to live in Calgary once he finishes his MLIS, if he will ever be living on Fairview Crescent. Although Greg was subtle about it, the whole homesearch tour was focused on me and I am somewhat alarmed that Fred didn't push for the Vampire Basement House. He's not one to take a back seat.

June 8

Of course we went to Banff. It blows my mind that Banff is to Calgary what St-Sauveur is to Montréal. We could go there for brunch. Struck by the wide open spaces just outside Calgary, prairie moving into mountains. Mountains are illusory. They shape-shift and move around. For a long time they're dreamlike, ghostly in the distance. Next thing you know they're looming over you like fortresses, battlements. They follow you, looming, tiptoeing behind you, ambushing you from behind buildings, suddenly popping up as if insistent that you should see them. Banff is a tourist town, nothing genuine or permanent about it. As Calgary was created by the CPR, Banff seems to have been created by the tourist industry. No one was born and raised here. Everyone we talked to came from eastern Canada, Europe, Japan, Australia, etc. Already full of students. I was a little surprised by how much British stuff there is out here.

**

Spring came late to Alberta and Lake Louise was just melting so I only caught glimpses of the blue-green glacial water. I've seen the quickest purest water I've ever seen out here in the mountains. Lake Louise is beautiful but so composed, already set up for photographs. Discovered how all-pervasive the CPR was (still is) in the west. Half the info on the historical plaques either referred to, or came from CP Rail's corporate archives. So many mountains named after explorers and surveyors connected with the railway. Joked about how I couldn't be any more Canadian than this: working for the CPR and moving west. Moraine Lake is wilder, a wealth of textures, ancient avalanches and rock slides, bands of green-blue water, smooth stones dyed indigo. The shore crackles underfoot.

June 9

Another gorgeous drive to Bow Valley Park. A mountain loomed like a Gothic castle. You could see the horses, carriages, villagers with torches winding their way up the road to the Impaler. Did some practice driving. This means my very first drive was along a road curving through the Rocky Mountains. All this is so strange, so new.

I don't think any more. All I do now is feel. I'm emotionally, spiritually, mentally stripped. There is no old way any more. Nothing is the same as it was. I'm in deep space. Sherry Turkle talks about "liminal moments" in a *Wired* interview, moments in the lives of both individuals and societies where the old has disappeared and the new hasn't yet established itself – the fear, excitement and intense creativity that grows out of these wild moments.

June 10

Total business day. Met Greg and the house inspector at the new house. Sandra came because she wanted to see the house. One of the things I most appreciate about Greg is how he addressed everything to me. The search was directed to what I wanted and it's a treat not to be shunted to the background and/or treated like some kind of June Cleaver by real estate agents. I think Greg has quickly picked up on the situation; brand new job I haven't started yet, Fred not coming for a year, no familiarity with Calgary. Both he and Sandra were attuned to the uncertainty factor and how much that drove our decisions.

We toured the house with the inspector, a soft-spoken man wearing soft-soled shoes. The house will get a good report. The most pressing issue is replacing the furnace. We also met one of the owners, which was pleasant. This was her first house and she said she was happy we were buying it and she doesn't have to show it. She and her partner are building a new house and will be moving out at the beginning of September. Our (my) move-in date in September 2. Spent the rest of the afternoon at the bank, where I was pleasantly surprised by friendly service.

June 11

Return trip to Montréal. Boarded the plane and saw three CP employees on it. The flight passed uneventfully until we reached Montréal where landing was delayed by storms. Plane trips are a lot like being in the hospital, a semi-conscious drone broken only by meals, snacks, a movie you would only watch while confined. We circled over Mirabel, part of a queue of endlessly circling planes.

Eventually we tore through a membrane of cloud and approached land. Soft and tender land veined with rivers, contoured by shadows, slightly smudged like bruised skin of a peach. Then we floated over the toy houses and cars, the Revlon swimming pools, blocks of buildings that made me think of text blocks and images in PageMaker. Our soon to be ex-neighbour Christine picked us up. She's moving out next week, leaving the Blockhead and his new room-mate buddy to their own devices. No doubt whose side the neighbourhood is on. Everyone misses Christine and thinks J-P is a putz. Montréal was so lush and jungly. It felt tropical after the dry, scoured climate of Calgary. I almost started crying again, but that happens all the time now.

June 12

Trying to get my bearings in my new office, which is Room 135 in Windsor Station. This is a little like attempting to go scuba diving without an oxygen tank. All the doors look the same, like tall Hershey chocolate bars and I keep bursting into Room 132 by mistake, just like Kramer on *Seinfeld*. The corridor is so dim I can barely see anyone. When people do approach me I'm never entirely sure if they're really who I think they are. Dream figures, figures from the past, people who look familiar but ghostly. The pink picture at one end of the hall leads to the concourse, the orange one to the exit staircase. I feel like I'm in exile up here.

Sometime around 5:00 I was on my way out via the staircase by the Research and Analysis department. It was my first time using that staircase and I tried opening the door the wrong way. The bar on the door crashed and then I skidded outside as someone opened it for me and said, “Gotcha! I gotcha!” It was Malcolm Cairns, who was standing in the doorway having a smoke with Terry Phillips, one of the VPs. I was oddly surprised to see him smoking. He was wearing sunglasses, regulation uniform of pale blue shirt, red tie and beige dockers. He and his director buddies occasionally stand there looking like mafioso. Terry Phillips vanished. Malcolm and I talked while he finished his cigarette. We ended up having a good conversation about Calgary and it seems he is nowhere near as sure of himself as he appeared a few months ago. I told him about my homesearch trip and then mentioned that my partner wouldn’t be coming out for a year or so.

This interested him. “We’re in the same boat then,” he said then said his wife was going out on a job search trip. She’s a teacher and he admitted she was fifty. He was cute about it – coy – lowering his voice as if her age was confidential. He is often coy. We talked about what we had here and were giving up. Unlike me, he has waterfront property, a boat, a beautiful house in Manotick Station, just outside Ottawa. He sounded unsure as to what they would do in Calgary. He mused a bit about going alone and renting. We talked about the difference in the cost of renting between Montréal and Calgary and how Fred and I decided renting in Calgary wasn’t worth it. I said I was glad there were actually trees in Calgary and our new house is surrounded by them. Then he pointed to the great old trees near the station and said, “But are there any like that?”

I told him I saw some good things about Calgary. Everyone I had dealt with on the homesearch trip was friendly and direct. He agreed. He said he knew Calgary well and liked it. I also found out that while he was working for the government he was relocated to Winnipeg. He had an arrangement where he could fly back to Ottawa every second weekend. It doesn’t seem he gets the same perk with CP. He asked if I had ever lived apart from my husband. When I said no he didn’t say anything but he seemed sympathetic. This is the most uncertain I’ve ever seen him and it was nice. I like seeing the real person behind the old boy posturing. And I really do miss my clients from BIS.

June 12-21

Strangest beginning to a new job ever. Employee communications? No such thing. Room 135 is a long room, a suite of workstations with high beige partitions. No one works here any more except Dave Jones and me, in the very back corner. Jonathan Hanna is in an office at the opposite end of the room. Technically he is in Room 131 but the doors to 131 and 135 lead to the same room. Room 135 is the Land that Time Forgot. It's a graveyard of old CP Rail News issues, reports, communiqués dating back to the Big Bang, with no order or organization whatsoever. I feel like the ghost of Windsor Station roaming the corridor, walking through the wrong doors when I'm not walking into them.

Dave Jones is on vacation now and I am alone, in isolation, sentenced to twenty years solitary confinement in ... Davy Jones's locker! When I look out the window I see the stone railing along the roof of the station. I feel like a prisoner in the Tower of London. In late afternoon it becomes eerie. The weather isn't helping. Every afternoon we get a cloudburst, aftermath from Hurricane Bertha, I suppose. The rain drives nails into the ground, trees are tempest-toss'd, the clouds are almost black. I could die in Room 135 and it could take months for anyone to find me.

Every so often I see people scuttling in and out of doors. The communications department is scattered all over the first floor. Every morning I hear the door open, footsteps, then I smell cigarette smoke, usually accompanied by a muffled litany of sports scores. It seems people come in and use Ralph Wilson's old office as a smoking room. The workstations of the employees who were laid off, like Lise Poirier, remain untouched with manuals, disks, piles of unfinished work. Kind of like Pompeii – a moment in time petrified forever in ash. No activity, no life. Only the past and these exhibits commemorating former employees. This is Being and Nothingness. Existential Communications.

The entire station is like this. Le Buffet has closed for renovations so there is no one on the concourse any more. Rachel Tremblay says she's not coming back when the buffet reopens. She doesn't want to come back because everyone is leaving. I've been experimenting with PageMaker. Again this is all very mystifying as I can't find any files for *the CP Rail News*.

Meanwhile ... horrible people are calling this phone number and yelling at me in French. Who are these people and why are they calling this number? Who do they think they're shouting at? Going by the bells, whistles and humming noises in the background I have a feeling they may be calling from a mental institution. I do not find this surprising. So here it is. First week of the job that is taking me to Calgary. I roam around like a ghost in Davy Jones's locker in complete isolation, staring out the castle window, occasionally receiving verbal abuse from people I don't know, that seem to be broadcast from outer space.

June 27-July 1

Trip to Michigan. Overnighted with Marsha and John in Kingston. Strange seeing a For Sale sign on their yard. They're moving because of Martin's school. That's a long way from now but I know Marsha is worried about their current neighbourhood becoming more unsavory. It was very noisy and rough the last time we visited. The sign makes me feel a little forlorn, knowing I may never see their new place. Even if I do, it won't ever have the same familiarity or hominess to me. Yet another certainty gone. Every pillar in my life is crumbling.

Marsha and I talked. She's one of few people I've confided my fears over Fred and our relationship. She's noticed how cheerful he's been about the move, and also how obsessed he is about school as if Calgary means nothing to him. All he talks about is school and the plagiarism charge. Marsha also didn't argue with me when I said I thought he was going through a mid-life crisis and associating himself a little too closely with the young library school women. I also mentioned how detached he seemed on our homesearch trip, not fighting for the house he preferred over Fairview. If Marsha isn't arguing with me, negating my feelings or sticking up for Fred – there's fire. I also told her how on some days it feels like there is nothing left between us and on other everything seemed fine, very nice. I also told her I am going to become the cliché of the cast-off wife. Even if his infatuation with dreadful Laurie fizzles he is looking and acting like a polecat in a chicken coop.

If the For Sale sign on Marsha's yard makes me feel forlorn, the Calgary relationship change is making Marsha feel insecure and forlorn too. She said if Fred and I could break up then anyone could, including herself and John. She also thinks Calgary is a very strange place and doesn't know what she'd do if she had to live there. She also said she couldn't relocate somewhere without John, that she didn't have my courage.

Left Kingston on the long road to Michigan. Did some highway driving and saw a lot of truck grills in the mirrors. I find driving physically exhausting. So much to think about, to try, to remember. None of it comes naturally to me and there's no instinct or experience to rely on. Driving and learning PageMaker are occupying a lot of my thoughts these days. You can't get killed on PageMaker though.

Arrived at Connie Crew's house in Lansing and it was like a late night Elrond party – everyone stoned and flopped out in the living room. Everywhere people, dogs and cats. Finally got to meet Thomma Calton, one of Fred's great e-mail pals, who arrived from Tennessee. She's from one of numerous bible belt regions in the US and has feminist and Darwin stickers on her little red car. She has a lovely voice, a sweet honeyed Tennessee accent and she is a singer/musician.

Connie works nights at Michigan State University systems office and we visited her work. A freezing cold room full of mainframe computers standing like refrigerators in a warehouse. Shelves full of cartridges, printers spitting out cryptic messages. We composed and sent a long email message to Diki Gust, who couldn't come because she's recovering from a heart attack. We even got Jimmy, a friend of Thomma's, who doesn't know Diki, to add to the email. I think we managed to cover every topic imaginable from concern over Diki's health to bondage and dominatrixes (Jimmy's contribution).

Connie returned from work in the morning and of course went to bed. Everyone slept in and I spent a lovely morning on the back porch shaded by a huge old catalpa tree, reading *Smilla's Sense of Snow*, which I love. A wonderful cryptic book. At times it seemed as if the language was bound in ice; the colours, life, danger and mystery you could detect beneath the surface is more important than the words themselves.

Long walk through the vast University of Michigan campus. I found Connie's intelligence, political knowledge and depth refreshing. I could talk politics with her forever. She thinks for herself. Her thoughts come from her own intelligence which is formed, but transcends, being working class. She told us she has suffered from depression throughout her life. I sometimes wonder if anyone who thinks and feels deeply in this world is going to feel depression.

Went on to downtown Lansing. Gorgeous old estate houses all looked shadowed or blackened as if by soot. Stately government buildings. After being at Connie's and spending so much time roaming around her neighbourhood it was almost impossible to believe Lansing has a downtown, that it isn't all small and personal.

July 15

Lunch with Gail. We met at the new "superstore" bookstore, Chapters. Coles bought up Smith Books and amalgamated into this chain of superstores. Very American, similar to Barnes and Noble with wide aisles and displays to make the books look especially enticing and an in-house café. Even an elevator to get from floor to floor. Independent bookstores are crying foul and there are a lot of issues arising from this merger: monopoly, how the publishing business will be affected, what will be published is what is most likely to sell in the superstore. The list goes on and on. But personally, I feel like a kid in a candy store.

I often don't feel comfortable in independent bookstores. Many are claustrophobic and unfriendly or downright snooty. Classical music always playing, the hush of Serious Literature. I often feel exposed while browsing, even a little embarrassed. It's like being in a museum or gallery. Chapters is full of people – it's like free museum day – and I do like that aspect of it.

Gail and I found a book of photographs called *Mother*. The photos depict a mother bearing a huge cross, others posed as a coffee table, strapped to the roof of a car, etc, accompanied by dry understated captions. Hilarious and pointed comment on the treatment of mothers (and women) in society. Gail and I loved it. We both laughed so hard in the store I was holding my stomach. Only with Gail do I laugh until my belly hurts.

We went to our favourite hang-out in Cours Montréal and talked. Ravil is still unemployed. When he does find a job it will likely be in the States and that means they will be facing a long-distance relationship. She is also worried sick about her son Ryan.

She's learning about computer programs at work, though, and doing very well. We talked about Jodie and Jane and their attitudes and Gail says she is going to learn in spite of everyone. It isn't given to her and so she will have to take it. Right on! Gail is a classic Taurus and if she says she's going to do something ... I told Gail the whole story about my new job – the Internet article, *Windsor World*, *CP Rail News*, the ARC award and she was genuinely thrilled for me.

We also talked a lot about being separated from Fred and Ravil. I mentioned my worries about Fred and Laurie. Gail said she would kill any woman who would go after Ravil. Her first husband, Greg the cop, a lifetime ago in California, cheated on her. Gail left him, left the house, took nothing with her except the boys and moved back in with her parents in Greenfield Park. She loves Ravil but there's still a part of her that yearns for the house, possessions and security she had. Her life has never had the kind of security she craves.

She has passionate, fierce feelings about marriage. Once, also during her first marriage, she and Greg had given a little dinner party in their home. Some cops were there, all were couples. The wife of one of the cops sat on Greg's lap. Gail leaned over, pinched her ass hard and said, "Keep away from my husband." The woman got off Greg's lap and they never saw that couple again socially. Gail's eyes narrowed when she told me this. I would never want to be on her bad side.

Love, laughter, tears, passion. No wonder I love Gail so much. She sees things in a very visual way and she'll describe things in an intuitive, poetic way. Her insights come from experience, the personal and empathy. She doesn't believe she is "intelligent" but I know she is. Anyone who sees, feels, learns, grows and has a sense of humour is intelligent.

July 17

I miss Véronique. Not an easy person to work with. I'm the only survivor except maybe Julie. I started yearning for her company and some red wine at L'Actuel. Since she is no longer above me at work (and I guess we don't even have a work relationship any more) I invited her out, and was honoured when she immediately accepted. She isn't going to L'Actuel any more and has found a secluded pizza place near Complexe Desjardins.

She makes BIS, CP Rail and work in general seem as intricate and treacherous as a Borgian court. There is something intricate, treacherous and Borgian about her so I suppose this is no revelation. But I still like her and think she's special. There's no one else like her. We're a match for each other. She has the same odd blend of reserve, discretion, secrecy, shyness and pride. She has a very astute knowledge of people and possesses a real wisdom. This has its shadow side in her though, and her judgments of people are often harsh. Add to this an awareness and desire for power. I wonder if she will ever truly be happy, achieve any peace of mind. She is tense, very tightly wound.

She's leaving BIS on August 2 and is glad. It will be a release. She agrees that it has been horrible to see the station clearing out, this ending that has been going on now for months. Anyone who still works in the station is divided into one of two factions: one who is leaving or one who is staying. As a francophone who is staying she says she resents the way companies are taking all the talent and leaving the dregs. No wonder there's so much unemployment in Montréal. The only people left here will be lay-offs. This artificially boosts Calgary's economic status and equally artificially depressing Montréal's.

It was a humid dusky Montréal evening. No matter what, Véronique is interesting company. Stimulating, unique. "I'm a mean little mama," she used to say at work. That turned out to be true but I never stopped liking her. As usual she hinted at court intrigue at BIS and indicated that maybe Isabel Bliss might not be the ideal software specialist. Véronique didn't get the finance job she applied for at Bell. It went to a financial analyst. She was depressed about it for a few weeks.

This evening wasn't like the old days though. This really was our goodbye and we both knew without saying anything that those days are gone and we will never see each other again. We caught the ten o'clock train and when Véronique got off at Lachine station she said, "Adios." We had some special times, magical even. One of these mysterious connections, a kindred spirit. No one in BIS even knew we were friends except Carol. It's funny I have strong feelings for Véronique, I probably always will, but I feel no regret, rather an acceptance that this part of my life is over. I'm surprisingly detached especially considering how I can't even cut ties with McGill. Mostly I feel like a survivor.

July 18

Gerry La Fontaine in town to write something for the next "Our Business" insert in The Canadian Pacific Railway News. Yes, CP Rail System (CPRS) has reverted to CPR, which is the name everyone in the country has always called it. I wonder how much money they'll spend on new stationery, biz cards, logos,, etc, etc, to return to a name no one ever stopped using in the first place. In addition Canadian Pacific Railway Company is now a subsidiary of Canadian Pacific Limited instead of a division. Meanwhile, the halls of Windsor Station are even emptier. Footsteps resound, voices echo. Dave Jones's work station was packed and he has moved to Calgary. His work station is now all contained in three plastic bins and I'm the only one left in Room 135.

Saw Gerry in the hall. He is in Montréal until Tuesday, staying with Carol. He was sympathetic about my impression of disorganization in the department and how demoralized I feel alone with nothing to do. As usual he is great for gossip. He thinks Isabel Bliss will be in bed with John Timmins before Christmas. He also thinks Ralph Wilson (my new boss) will overstep and end up in a lot of trouble. AN interesting thing about Gerry is that both Véronique and Isabel, who hate each other but good friends of Carol really dislike him, say he's a user, full of himself, plays games and Carol could do a lot better. But he's observant, articulate and if you take him for what he is, he's good company., something I really appreciate these days.

Ralph Wilson was recently in town in full cowboy regalia, jeans, boots, stetson, tie clip. “Ralphie-boy” is over the top in all aspects. He is over budget, has bought a 275,000 executive house in Calgary, is seriously overdrawn on his CP credit card. His latest scheme, known as Wilson’s Mutiny, is to pull his department out of Government and Public Affairs and into Human Resources. Not even Dave Jones knows if this is a dream or a *fait accompli*. He looks a lot like the comedian Martin Mull, with mustard yellow hair and mocking look. I have only met him twice but according to everyone he is a high roller, a snake oil peddler. To me he looks like a Depression-era carnie hustling people to his caravan. “Step right up ... See the crowned heads of Europe.”

July 20

Our Dorval house officially for sale. The corporate real estate company, Royal LePage, has assigned us an agent, David Hughes. This entire process seems to be unfolding in gut-wrenching lurches. Weird stasis for long periods of time, then *bam*, the entire cast of characters is calling, demanding paperwork, signatures, transfers of impossible amounts of money, etc etc. David Hughes is rather stiff and self-conscious but he does have a sense of humour. It seems Boris and Natasha can sniff out real estate agents almost as well as they detect vets. They know something is wrong and that the house is gradually being dismantled. Natasha crouched on the floor in guerilla pose and stared at David, her eyes huge and full of reproach. Reproach soon gave way to a full frontal “J’accuse!” She glared at him for so long he put up his hands and said, “It’s not *my* fault!”

Boris climbed into my lap and smurgled. Both monsters followed us all over the house, Natasha as envoy, Boris stationed a few feet behind her just around a corner or in a doorway. No the furries are not happy and they banded together against this interloper. I know exactly how they feel. The red and white For Sale sign is now planted on our yard. It is irrevocable. No turning back now. Our house has become public property. People slow down in cars and gawk as they pass as if the house is a tourist site. I feel as if I’m on stage while gardening or mowing the yard. When I look out my workroom window all I see is that sign in my face.

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Driving lesson. Today's agenda: Centreville. It is certainly different experiencing Montréal from the opposite side of the windshield! I don't know quite what to make of Gustavo, my driving instructor. He reminds of of a strict, merciless zen master. "The Lotus position must be done this way only or you will never achieve enlightenment." *Whack*. He speaks in riddles, conundrums and unanswerable questions. "You must learn to relax behind the wheel. Your motions must flow. Why do you want to jerk the car to the right? Whack whack whack. "Why did you look to the left when you wanted to switch to the right lane? These questions cannot be answered. "Uh ... because I'm stupid? I have driver's dyslexia?"

Gustavo (Gestapo) is a rumpled, drowsy-looking little man, who is always rummaging through his plastic bag full of snacks. He's from Colombia and speaks excellent English, but he regaled me with his opinions on the Québec separatists and how much he wished he were going to Calgary. He grumbled about young girls "making themselves look so ugly with their koolaid-coloured hair." He cranked on about the dangers of in-line skating and how it should be banned. He also told me he's jealous of my corporate job. He does like trucks though and would like to be a truck driver. "I'm a nomad," he pronounced. After two hours of *whack whack whack* he said I had very good control of the car, was an excellent highway driver and could drive a straight line; the only thing wrong is how tense I am behind the wheel, a tension which is caused by resistance. I am resisting the car.

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Downtown is a Hieronymus Bosch canvas behind the wheel. Pedestrians are an unruly mob, cyclists appear with the speed and force of missiles, in-line skater seems to deliberately aim themselves at cars. Road signs are either inaccurate, hidden or placed in locations where they're almost impossible to see from a car sea. This is a city full of canyons, potholes, dangerous point curves. Acceleration lanes curve. Hairpin turns are reinforced with concrete. Ste-Catherine is a jumble of cars, buses, pedestrians, construction workers, none of whom will yield to anyone else.

Careened around Upper Westmount, the little driver's ed car swinging wide around the Jaguars, Porsches, etc, Gestapo's voice drilling in my ears, cryptic questions and riddles. "Why did you swing wide like that? Why did you slow down/speed up when you should have sped up/slowed down?" Why is the sky blue? Is there a god? My mind is apparently unfathomable. Driving is truly a zen experience. You have to learn how to let go and do things that defy all logic and anything you've learned about the world as a pedestrian.

Aug. 1

Went to a movie, *Stealing Beauty*, with Gail and Jane. Interesting to see the two together, the way Jane holds herself aloof, resisting Gail's maternal intensity. Jane is restless, over-controlling. She shrugs off Gail's emotional remarks. Yet they complement each other. Jane needs some of Gail's emotion and warmth and Gail could use some of Jane's logic, objectivity and mental energy. I'm very fond of both of them for opposite reasons. Jane for her desire to recreate herself, her never-ending quest to better herself. Gail doesn't understand that sometimes what you aspire to be and your ideals are as important as "reality."

Gail often scoffs at Jane and my political viewpoints and our love of Montréal, simply because we weren't born here and don't have blood earth ties to the city. To me this sounds as nationalistic as any "pur laine" sovereigntist. Jane and I have both chosen to live in Montréal – that makes it our home as much as anyone else's. Maybe even more so because we chose it – we aren't stuck here. Gail can be a little too rooted and she denies us our voice and experience in the city, just as she claims the French are doing to her and her family.

However, being a self-created person means that Jane is stiff. She can't relax or be spontaneous. We went into Chapter and showed Jane the book on mothers we had laughed so hard over a couple of weeks ago. I was afraid Jane would purse her lips and riffle through it disapprovingly, if for no other reason than because Gail liked it. Jane did laugh though and it was great to hear it. We had fun insulting all of the stupid books publishers are dumping into the stores. We figured we should collaborate on a book about computer programs for cats and rabbits (Gail has inherited several rabbits from her son Ryan).

Gail urged me to tell Jane the story of how I got the new job. She loved it. It brought out the gracious, supportive, idealistic side in Jane. She was genuinely thrilled and said, "It's great that it happened to you but it's even better knowing these things happen at all." Amen to that!

The movie was beautifully photographed. As Jane said, "It's too bad McGill doesn't open a branch of campus in Tuscany!" A young beautiful woman arrives in Tuscany and finds herself surrounded by older, experienced couples. It reminded me a little of an Elizabeth Bowen novel, *Death of the Heart*, which was devastating.

This movie wasn't nearly as powerful. The girl didn't seem to go through any conflict or pain. There was no betrayal of youth or idealism. The older couples were all suitably jaded, deep in their games. The girl lost her virginity at the end but I didn't really care all that much. But Tuscany was beautiful and it was lovely to see Gail and Jane before leaving for Calgary., Leaving for Calgary. My heart just sank again.

Aug. 2

CPR "Goodbye Girls" dinner at Jardin Panos on Duluth. Walked over from Windsor Station with Isabel Bliss, who now works with Carol in BIS. She is delightful company and I'm looking forward to getting to know her better in Calgary. She's close to my age and our paths must have crossed so often through the city over the years. She knows a lot about astrology and is a Pisces. She once worked at the Anarchist Bookshop and pointed out some graffiti she had helped spray on the wall.

She is intuitive, perceptive and very honest, says whatever is on her mind. She's inquisitive too – endlessly curious about people. Funny how her new job working with Carol at BIS has changed her. Or maybe it hasn't; I never knew her when she was a Government Affairs analyst. She's having a rough time adjusting to BIS and misses her GIA work. She is arguing with Carol and says Véronique is treacherous and Elise is driving her crazy. She finds the BIS job stifling and regimented compared to GIA. Yet it seems to me she has really become more herself since starting there. Her clothing style is more casual. She also seems less wary than I remember, more open and expressive. Physically, she resembles me; brown eyes, light olive skin, similar height and weight. We also go to the same hairdresser, Julian, and have the same short hairstyle. This looks like a blossoming friendship. I really hope so. She'll challenge me in a lot of ways with her honesty and curiosity.

We roamed through the McGill ghetto, down hot, treeless Duluth and reminisced about the Fringe Festival, the Word bookstore, the Rapunzel mural, favourite political graffiti, the Anarchist Bookstore. Isabel majored in Women's Studies at Concordia and is familiar with a lot of the same kind of theory I cut my teeth on. She asks questions all the time but remembers what you tell her. She tosses out perceptive, almost poetic observations all the time.

I enjoyed my walk with her so much I didn't really care whether or not we found Jardin Panos. But find it we did and the group was already assembled. It was a soft warm Montréal night and the terrasse was perfect, a private space lush with vegetation. It made me feel as if I had turned a corner and found myself in Greece.

Surrounded by CP women. Some of us going to Calgary, some staying in Montréal, some leaving the company. All of us facing life changes. Reminded me a lot of the last days of university with friends, acquaintances, classmates all on the brink of scattering. We've come together for a little while and now separating again, either returning to a place from where they've come or heading in a new unknown direction. Maria Suppa told hilarious stories about various GIA characters. Judith Nefsky is staying in Montréal for now, managing the archives. Isabel, Peta Stuart and Judy Dunham are going to Calgary.

Peta, manager of the Graphics department, is an interesting woman, more than what appears on the surface. Isabel said exactly the same thing then added, “I want to find out more about Peta. I want to know what really makes her tick.” Peta is short and trim. Her eyes are bright, her smile wide and generous. She is intelligent, creative, organized, perceptive and very disciplined. She lived for a while in Japan and I think I see a Japanese affinity for order, discipline and self-control in her. I have also seen her when the facade cracks a little, when fatigue, impatience and even anger has appeared on her face. I think she does a lot to repress this side of herself. She once said the only way to deal with Ralph Wilson was to just go along with him and let anything he says wash off your back. I think she will be an ally for me in the department and am looking forward to getting to know her.

Judy Dunham, the department’s administrative assistant, is also going to Calgary. This was my first time meeting her. She is in her fifties, dresses like a girl and wears her hair in a ponytail. She has a high-pitched wispy little-girl voice too. At first I thought she was an aging cheerleader type but she is far more interesting than that. She is spacey but in a gentle whimsical way. We talked about how much we love our houses here. She also lived in a Cape Cod cottage and said one of her favourite things in the world was switching off the lights at night and being able to walk upstairs to her bed. It was a little ritual closing the day. She hasn’t found a place in Calgary yet but showed us a photo of the house she almost bought!

Laurie Mitchell came in from Ottawa, a breath of elegance. She looked strained, though. She lives in a house with a room-mate in Ottawa and commutes to Montréal on weekends to be with her husband. So many changes, upheavals. Big career decisions. Later, Isabel, Peta, Judith Nefsky and I took the 144 bus over the mountain to the Métro. Montréal is such a beautiful city, beautiful in a way Calgary can never be.

Aug. 7

Isabel invited me on a boat cruise on the St Lawrence. She knows the captain and got us free tickets. The Montréal skyline was dove-grey; the city illusory, unattainable. The water swelled, all soft cloud shapes. We passed Île Ste-Hélène, the east end, Laval, details softened in the evening light. No colour, only shades of grey, light and dark, luminous rainlight in the sky, doubled, reflected in the water beneath us. The river flowed on, a wide, unformed emotion. The city belonged to the river and the world was a reflection, a dream, a memory. The air cooled as we reached open water. Isabel and I sat up on deck and it could have been an ocean liner during war time; two war brides in long filmy dresses leaving behind all we had ever known while below, the band played on. Returning, the river was swept with city lights and the bridge appeared, as celestial and thrilling as ever. It was a beautiful, utterly heart-rending evening.

Aug. 8

Final stage. I feel like a cartoon mouse who has just started going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. My whole department is moving. The first floor is bedlam with offices being dismantled, boxes and plastic bins everywhere. Outside the concourse entrance to the station is a huge North American Van Lines trailer blocking the street. My computer was packed up today – a week early. I had to go ask Richard Laferrière in the business research department to print something out for me.

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Helped Fred move computers to his Westmount apartment. He spent the night there and we tested out Okyto, an on-line email communications program. It was rather strange.

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My one-person, one-way airline ticket arrived at Rider Travel, which has a temporary office in the Station. Went to the IBM building for a cry.

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Marsha, John and Martin overnight visit.

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Meetings at the Royal Bank with the notary and with Logical Moving Solutions.

Aug. 22

Dorval house packed up. A family of movers arrived; large bearded man, thin weathered woman and two teenaged girls. I was surprised, having expected a couple of burly men. Today is packing day; the move is tomorrow. The woman packed up the kitchen, all the old china, the antiques. It took her all day to do that. She was very sharp, spotted chips and cracks I didn't know about. But if any claims are made at the end, they don't get paid. No wonder she's sharp. We signed a release about the chipped china, and it was a good thing for me to know, too, just to know the things weren't damaged in the move. It would feel terrible getting out there and finding broken china.

Wendy Langill and the three kids were outside and I spent most of the long awful day with them. I didn't want to see the packing, my life swallowed up in boxes. I caught a glimpse of the girls heaving some books into a box and knew I didn't want to see any more. Wendy was wonderful to me. So good to have a friendly voice and the sense of a regular life going on while mine was being dismantled, literally taken away from me. She has been such a good neighbour and made this day endurable.

Saw the movers having a coffee break in the back of their van. I wonder what their lives are like. I overheard the woman barking at one of the girls. Her voice was very harsh and I caught a resentful look on the girl's face. Those kids must be working all the time. They must be together all the time, working in close proximity. It must also be a nomadic kind of life, going into people's houses and tearing them apart.

The car was taken away today, a day earlier than expected. We went to Eric and Toni's to borrow one of their old cars. Toni's business, Zenas Designs, has taken off and their basement is now a warehouse, full of neatly folded t-shirts and sweatshirts. Orders and invoices are pouring in. Two women come in part-time to fold and tidy. Eric is fulltime office/business manager. Since they work in their home they don't really get a break from each other. Toni is the artist and initiator of the business and it is named after her grandfather. I really admire the way Toni has established her own identity against the van der Harst bombast.

As for Eric, he's becoming more eccentric all the time. He and Toni are such boomers. Their house is in Santa Fe style and they have a *Big Chill* kind of life with an assortment of close friends. Yet Eric seems to live in a world of his own, with a viewpoint that would grant him membership in the Michigan militia. I often don't see much difference between him and Bill Gorman, except a degree of paranoia. Eric thinks everything is a socialist conspiracy, any form of government is socialism, undeserved welfare. Then he'll turn around and complain about the parks in Ontario, how you can't park in a private campground without being hassled by noise and parties and the only quiet parks are state parks. So ... governments have no business in people's lives and everything should be dictated by free market economy. Except for parks where Eric wants to camp, I guess.

He also doesn't seem to have any idea why we are moving and made some jibe about us "obeying the company." This coming from a man who hasn't worked in the real world for years. He partially owns a business only because of Toni's marketable artistic skills and initiative. Without her he'd be covered in barnacles. I do go up and down with Eric. There are times when I really like him, I find him sensitive to others and generous. Then there are times like today when I find him odd and blunt to the point of being mean.

Aug. 23

All of us, including Boris and Natasha, now at Fred's Westmount apartment. It's quite nice but it is a basement and the cats and I are having adjustment problems. It's hard adapting back to the noise of an apartment especially when coupled with the bereft feeling of losing my home. I am numb with loss. My little dream house turned out to be exactly that.

Moving day. We drove Eric's car from the Westmount apartment to Dorval. Before turning up Stream Fred told me to close my eyes. When I was allowed to open them again there was a huge container parked in front of the house. Red and black lettering: CP Rail Intermodal Freight Systems. What a spectacle! I had expected a small North American truck outside the door not this huge CP Rail monster. Wendy and Bob were quite bemused by it as well, especially since it was partially blocking their driveway. It also blocked J-P's ambulance. For me the scene was extremely symbolic, the house hidden by this corporate container. Pretty much said it all.

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Unpleasant surprise. Alan Thomson on Westmount Moving called to say that the packers from yesterday had filed a report about us. According to them we were planning to make all kinds of false claims and that we had been cheating the company for years! We were told that human resources officials from CP were due to arrive and the move was on hold. I was outraged! I paced the top of the driveway, waiting to take on all comers. Call HR. My records prove I could not possibly been cheating the company for years!

Al Thomson arrived in his van. We sat inside it and talked and he showed me the report. It seems as if the packers took jokes Fred made at face value and wrote them down as serious statements of intent. "Shipper is going to break items and claim on them." The remark that had upset Thomson was, "Shipper was upset when I wouldn't pocket his money." I explained that the money comment must have been a very literal interpretation of some jokes Fred had made. We had found some containers full of change. We couldn't move the containers and we weren't sure what to do with them. "You take them," Fred had said to the packer as a joke. The packer had laughed at the time – then obviously reported it as an attempt at bribery. Wow.

Thomson said he received the report but didn't tell CP about it. I volunteered to sign a waiver or statement that these were jokes and we had no intention of doing any of these things. Thomson said that as far as he was concerned the report didn't exist. After that, things went well. The movers were efficient and friendly and they literally emptied the house. In spite of the flap Fred followed the movers around, still making jokes. I wonder about the packers filing such a report. Are their circumstances so precarious that they over-reacted to prove their loyalty to Westmount? Maybe they simply didn't understand Fred's comments as jokes. Kind of a cultural difference. I imagined writing my own report. "Packer threatened to imprison shipper in van." "Packers threatened to chainsaw furniture." "Packers tried to tear out tree and hoist it into truck. "Packers tore books in half to fit more of them in a box" (that one might not be far from the truth). I did like it that Thomson didn't throw his packers to the wolves nor did he dispute their honesty. He said he had worked with them for fifteen years and he truly came to negotiate.

24 Aug. to Sept. 1

It might almost be pleasant if I didn't feel so weird, so taken out of the world. A very simple way of spending the days, a little like being on the Lewis R French. Spending a lot of time in Westmount Park, which is right across the street from Fred's apartment. Westmount is an interesting little principality within the city. A lot of well-preserved old people in Tilly hats and Tevas, playing tennis, walking dogs, among them the largest poodle I've ever seen in my life. Early morning in the park I see power walkers, people doing tai chi and even a group of people who jump like frogs along the ground.

Two young girls who looked far older than their years, hair severely parted and braided into two pigtails. One of the girls wore a heavy striped blouse and thick grey skirt. The other wore a dark flowered dress buttoned up to her chin. Both wore hard black shoes and dark stockings. I didn't recognize the language they spoke, and for some reason they reminded me of boarding school girls from Switzerland or Belgium in the 1940s. Flash thought to Mavis Gallant.

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Days blending into each other. I don't know the date. I wish I had an office to go to. I feel as if everything in the world has been taken from me. Fred is relentlessly cheerful as if it doesn't matter to him that I'm leaving. I don't think it does matter to him. If I wasn't in this almost zen-like state I'd be humiliated and angry but I can't even access those feelings. Instead I roam the city, half-wanting to see old haunts, visit people and half-wanting to avoid them. Sense of this being a time of reckoning, of reaping what I've sowed. I've seen all I'm going to see of Montréal, experienced all I'm going to here. No point in trying to recapture the past. It never occurred to me this would end, a passage in time, a chapter in a biography that could be entitled "the Montréal Years."

I'll never be intimate with the city any more, the sights, sounds, textures, the old streets, spiral staircases, balconies, ruelles with speed bumps. When/if I see any of these things again it will be as an outsider, a tourist, not one living and working in the city. There is nothing to do now but live through the passing days, flitting in and out of Fred's apartment like a ghost. Time is passing so slowly and so inexorably at the same time. This coming Monday I will be on an airplane. To Calgary.

**

Dropped by Howard Ross after sitting for ages on campus trying to decide whether or not to visit. Finally I entered and was welcomed with open arms by Jane. It was Sheila Gover's last day and I came just in time for cake and coffee. Enjoyed Jane's stimulating and contradictory personality. Told Judy Symansky all about the job and the Calgary story. Louise Colby still keeps in touch through email. She's in Brampton now, presumably with Manfred Monti. For so many years the employee lounge of Howard Ross has been a home to me.

Aug. 31

Dinner at the Mess Hall with Fred's mother. She has been great about Calgary; supportive, understanding, perceptive, even generous! I wonder what it is about the move that has brought out these qualities. She said it was a shame that Fred wasn't going because I wouldn't be able to share my new experiences with him. We ate out on the sidewalk terrasse, had fairly expensive meals with wine and she paid for it with a discreet generosity I've never seen in her before. She hasn't said anything stupid or reactionary about the move since she first heard about it.

Sept. 1

Spent my last day in Montréal with Gail and Ravil. I can't describe this day; don't know how I lived through it.

Sept. 2

Made my way through the thickets of the Calgary airport and grabbed a taxi. It was driven by an elderly Sikh who had trouble with directions to the Best Western. While paused at the first set of traffic lights, still on the outskirts of downtown, a woman wrenched the car door open, flung herself in beside me and hijacked the cab! She had been trying to get hold of a taxi all morning and was "mad as hell." She was a thin middle-aged woman dressed in tight jeans and a little nubby jacket. She wasn't menacing though. She ordered the driver to go somewhere in the north part of the city and when she got out, she ordered the driver to turn off the meter before continuing to the Best Western. Then she leaned in to me and said, "Next time, honey, take Associated."

**

Checked into the Best Western. Met Greg and Sandra for the walk-through at the Fairview Crescent house. They gave me a big basket, which included a bottle champagne and two glasses. Heard all about the real estate skullduggery caused by the despicable Lise McKenzie from Royal LePage.

Royal LePage is the corporate real estate company who has exclusive rights to the CP relocation. They completely dropped the ball on my move and I found Greg and Sandra on my own. McKenzie, who had completely ignored me throughout the whole process harassed me to get Sandra to hand over the commission to McKenzie. I refused. Greg and Sandra put in a lot of work. They were nothing but kind and professional to me. McKenzie started harassing Sandra to hand over the commission. Then McKenzie made Sandra mad by bad-mouthing her to other real estate agents, one of whom turned out to be a good friend of Sandra's. Sandra told McKenzie to write her a letter stating what damage not turning over the commission would do to the client (me). Sandra never received a letter and Lise never received her commission. Good!

Returned to the Best Western where I ran into Carol Mascaro from the Research and Analysis department, good clients of mine from the BIS days. She was meeting Ken McGuire for dinner and invited me to come along. Dinner with Ken, Carol M and another CP woman named Cheryl, who had relocated from Vancouver. Ken took us on a tour of his new house in the southeast, quite close to me. He loves Calgary and has already explored most of the city. He was happy to leave Montréal, said he was tired of "being sneered at." He was so excited about the shopping centres along the Macleod Trail it was almost contagious.

Back at the Best Western, Carol and I took the elevator to our rooms. Ran into Larry Stilwell from my new department, who is also staying on the 14th floor. This was a lot like the first days of Queen's University, after leaving home for the first time. You meet people, form temporary friendships, gather in loose groups not having a clue if any of these early relationships will last. It's hard to know how to act. Too friendly you risk seeming desperate. If you play it too cool you risk cutting off another lonely soul and a genuine connection. Some people are lonely and homesick, others are excited and love Calgary already. Each person I encounter brings out a different side of my own feelings about this move.

A four hour flight has transformed me into an eighteen year-old again; excited, homesick, eager to please, my heart on my sleeve. Nothing familiar, no habit, no routine, no one I know well, nothing to filter my feelings and senses. My moods swing drastically from moment to moment and there's nothing to tether them.

I've been stripped to the most elemental level. I have no defenses. I truly have become a gawky, hopeful, lonely, emotional eighteen year-old again. The 14th floor of the Best Western was a CP Rail dorm. It was just like being in Victoria Hall. Throughout the night I heard doors open and close and I lay there wondering who was seeing whom, if I knew anyone, if someone was having a party, if I should put my clothes on and see who was out there or if I should pull the covers over my head and block them out because the chances of me knowing them are almost nil. It seems some feelings never go away, or maybe the move is making everyone's inner eighteen year-old emerge.

Sept. 3

Up early. Cold, hard rain. I had a suitcase full of summer clothes since it had been hot up until now. Took a taxi to the house for the move in, the reunion with all the furniture and possessions. Being on an expense account makes me feel rich and eccentric like Fred's Oma. "To 135 Fairview, my good man." Almost forgot to get the receipt and had to dash back to the cab for it. There will be a lot of trial and error.

I waited inside the empty house, floors cold on my feet. 10:00, I was staring at the walls of the second bedroom, which will become the computer room, if I ever see my computer again. 11:00 rolled around. All I had to read was a *Film Comment* magazine I had snatched from the Katmandu Café. Finally called the moving company and was told my move had been put off until the next day.

Caught the No 10 bus to go to GCS. Transit so different here. The bus driver is a burly man who wears a captain's hat. You have to push the doors to exit, something I discovered the hard way while standing and waiting for them to open. The buses have very low floors but not much seat space. The bus wends its way down Macleod Trail, which is a plug-ugly piece of road, all shopping centres and dreary chainstores. But it ends up right downtown and I can either walk to GCS outside or duck into a Plus 15 and roam through a labyrinth of passages which connect to GCS. Reached the Welcome Centre, hunched like a drenched heron in my little spring jacket. The first person I ran into was Joan Moran who said, "The lost souls are finding their way."

Gulf Canada Square is a strange building. Not old and enchanted like Windsor Station, but if CP had to be located in a modern office tower, this is the one it would choose. It is utterly disorienting and I spent ages trying to determine which bank of elevators I needed. I kept having to get off at the 10th floor and transfer to another bank, but since all of the floors look the same and the elevators aren't labelled yet, finding my office was pure trial and error.

There is even more separation between departments and employees than there was at the station. Most departments use the east atrium elevators and we're on the other side. I saw many familiar faces but there's no station concourse. That kind of public square, meeting place no longer exists. I feel locked into my own department. With so many other companies housed in the building CP is diffused and the camaraderie is gone.

Even from the outside, GCS is a funhouse. There is nothing defined about its shape. The glass seems to waver, melt, shape-shift. It's difficult to get a sense of where it is precisely located downtown. I have to use other buildings as reference points through my Plus 15 windows. It is a hall of mirrors, a funhouse illusion. It makes any direct flow of communication between people impossible. How typical of CP. They managed to find the 1996 Calgary equivalent to Windsor Station with its wings, levels, half-levels, difficulties.

If the building is an illusion, the 20th floor is going through the looking glass. Any time I left my work station, which I share with Dave Jones, I ended up wandering in circles. It was like having amnesia. No landmarks, signposts, breadcrumbs to direct me back to my ergonomic chair. There isn't one clock on the entire floor and I eventually had to ask someone where the washroom was (hidden in the new BIS area). To return to my chair I had to follow a pattern on the carpet or I would end up in the bookshelves. Every so often I saw Carol, Isabel or some of the new people flitting by, like glimpsing forest creatures through the thicket. A slight flurry of motion, sighting of colour. Quail breaking cover.

**

Went to my orientation session at the Welcome Centre, reminiscent of frosh week. Met Kim Primrose who had transferred from Toronto. I was escorted to my new workplace. The view on 20 West is magnificent. I stood in the middle of the room, practically gasping over the light, layers of luminous light, sky and clouds, city spread below but so quickly giving way to the vastness of the prairies. The mountains appeared before me like a vision. Could I really be here?

Reacquainted with Peta, Larry and Rick Robinson; Dave Jones. My work station pod is better than I feared, and I was happy to find the senior managers are all on the fifth floor far away from us on the 20th. Carol Lacourte and BIS are beside us. She lost her office and is in a pod with Isabel and the new research librarian, Gail Frasier, who is a Calgarian and not a transferee.

**

Prowled around Eau Claire market and ended up buying a black turtleneck. I am so cold and damp and all I have is a suitcase full of summer clothes. Ran into Carol Lacourte and Judith Nefsky and had coffee with them at the Good Earth. Carol and Judith went to Glacier National Park in Montana over the weekend. Carol saw Malcolm Cairns, his wife and twenty year-old son on one of the hiking trails. The son has an ear-ring. Carol said she thought of me and laughed.

Sept. 4

Red wine and snacks with Carol at her new condo in the Eau Claire area. Her place is beautifully decorated, full of antiques. It's also a little cold, cold in the sense that it doesn't feel lived in yet and she seems a little lost in it. We had a good talk about Calgary and we share a lot of the same impressions, one being it's not really that friendly a city – it's all professional courtesy. It's a collage of a city, full of strange combinations. It's a hard city to be alone in because there's no street life and people don't seem to have the slightest idea how to react to a single woman.

Carol has lived such an interesting life. I respect her a lot for her spirit, courage and broad experience. She understands a lot about people. Véronique called while I there. She hasn't found a job yet.

We went for dinner at Joey Tomato's. The market itself was as deserted as a Portland beach in November. Joey Tomato's, however, was full of people as if all people out after a certain hour in Calgary were required by law to be contained in one room. Carol told me about her horrible moving experience, the worst one I have heard about. The unpackers came to her place in the evening. The unpacker was a rude, burly guy from Québec City, who kept going on about how tired he was and what an imposition it was to have to move in the evening. Carol didn't have a choice about her move-in time.

Relations deteriorated as the move progressed. Carol asked him to place a mirror in her bedroom. He was setting it up wrong and would damage it if he kept going. When Carol pointed it out he turned to her and said, "No woman tells me how to move." When she stood up for herself he wrapped his fingers around her neck to strangle her! After he left she was too frightened to call the police. She did the next day, though and laid assault charges on the guy. The police picked him up and Mr Macho Terrorist Mover had to spend a day in jail.

Sept. 5

My furniture arrived – the return of the Godzilla container. I was a little nervous after hearing Carol's story but these movers were cheerful and competent. Everyone always asks where my husband is, why isn't he here with me, etc etc. The politics of being a single woman who has relocated with a company to Calgary. It's an intricate dance. I just respond that Fred is staying in Montréal for a year because of school. "He's upgrading himself so he can get a better job when he gets here." I feel way too vulnerable to respond with any more assertion than that.

Box after box, piece after piece poured into the house. Every room crammed with boxes and since the lay-out of this house is completely different from the one in Dorval I knew I couldn't place the contents of even half of these boxes in the rooms designated by notes on the cartons. Spent the entire day checking off packing numbers and trying as much as possible to direct the movers but since I didn't know where to put most of the stuff there wasn't too much order I could impose on the chaos.

After I saw the last carton come in I staggered down to Spagucci's for a pasta dinner. An oldies music radio station was playing. "Fly Away" by John Denver. "In the whole world there's no one as lonely as she ..." I started to cry and ducked into the washroom. Things echo when you're alone in a new place. Everything looks so sharply, achingly defined. I feel so singled out. Everything pierces me. On my walk back to the house from Spagucci's I noticed all the crows and magpies.

TV stations come from Spokane, Washington. The state. Not DC. Weather reports for Kamloops and Jasper. I still feel as if I've come to the end of the world. The late afternoon light is so intense it's almost apocalyptic. Yet the strange part is that in this city I don't know is hundreds of familiar faces. Wherever I go I look to see if anyone from CP is around. I'm exhausted from the move although I hardly had to lift a finger. The air is so thin here I'm gasping for breath. I've been sucked dry. Returned to the house and set the old bed up in the jail-cell room in the basement until I am able to get help in assembling the waterbed in the main floor bedroom. Isabel called. My first phone call at the new house. I'm still using the foam shoe-phone. I was so happy to hear from her. Such a thoughtful, perfect thing to do.

Sept. 6

Unpackers arrived. Two women; Sandy and her mother, Jan. I've become very curious about the lives of people in the moving industry. Jan opened boxes and generally created havoc. I stayed in the kitchen with Sandy and we talked about antiques, hockey, men and country-western music. Jan came in and mentioned a square-dancing club I should join.

Sandy was very helpful with the china and kitchen stuff. Between us we quickly placed the dishes and china. I'm so glad Sandy was there to unpack the china because she was careful. Not one tiny piece got lost or accidentally trashed. The rest was mayhem. Boxes were opened at random and junk I didn't need, most of it Fred's, was in my face. I discovered there was no common sense to any of the packing that had been done in Montréal. Garbage was wrapped in protective paper while my old mirror was thrown in a box with no protection. It broke. The antique cabinet never got its crate and I shuddered when I saw it brought in, covered by two cardboard boxes taped together. One of the wardrobe boxes contained a garden hose, which made Sandy, Jan and I laugh. Because what else could you do?

They wouldn't unpack any of the boxes of books, which were a headache for me. Most of those boxes were too heavy for me to move and I had to empty them all first, handful after handful of books. I've never hated books before. Later, a man came to hook up the appliances, again courtesy of CP Rail. He said he had only once been to Montréal. He was in a bar. Someone insulted Rocket Richard and a brawl broke out. This turned into an English-French riot and was really frightening. At the end of the day Jan gave me her phone number and offered to come over and help me out for free. She said she didn't have anything else to do. The only stipulation was not to call during a hockey game. She lives just down the street.

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This is a much more blue-collar area than Dorval. It also seems this little southeast corner of Calgary is the heartland of good ol' boy Alberta. Preston Manning's riding office is on Macleod Trail. There's a Baptist church on my way to the bus stop, sign always bearing a new god homily. Curbs lined with pick-up trucks and lots of 70s cars, including Trans Ams and Firebirds. There are two sides here: front and back. The front looks like any neighbourhood with stucco bungalows, tidy yards, gardens, ornaments. The back is criss-crossed with gravel alleys, a jumble of fences, sheds, vehicles. The fences are all at least five feet high. Properties are all enclosed here. It seems strange that in the west, where you think of the song "Don't Fence Me In," everything is fenced in. I wonder if it's a hold-over from homestead days when you needed fences for protection or to keep horses.

I now know what existential angst is. It's being in a house full of boxes, where the gleaming hardwood floors are cold and your footsteps all over the house, knowing F is having the time of his life in Montréal, that he doesn't miss me and he doesn't care any more for me and then hearing Hank Williams bawl "Your Cheatin' Heart" from a pick-up truck parked outside the window.

Sept. 7

Wrestling with the waterbed. Took me ages to find a tap where I could connect the hose. None of the taps upstairs or outside would fit and I had to run the hose to the basement. This meant the water had to run uphill. Not the most efficient way of filling a waterbed. Finally the water started merrily chugging into the mattress. While waiting for it to fill I started working on the house. The dining room is basically set up, living room taking shape. I really wanted to set up a workroom, but this room was a disaster. It was basically a warehouse of junk. Stacks of book boxes, stereo equipment, dismantled tables. Boxes of records and CDs taken out of their milk crates and packed in no order. I also pulled out mangled books that were used to wrap stupid crap that we should have tossed out before the move.

I was trying to create some order out of this chaos when I remembered the waterbed. The mattress was full but lopsided, a quivering heap in the middle of the bed. I had forgotten the first rule of waterbeds. The mattress needs to be straightened constantly. Luckily, Isabel, Greg Rosval and their daughter Daphne arrived. Greg helped me drain the mattress. He used to have one in the 70s. A lot of people did. I'm one of the few people who has kept mine. Then I went to spend the night with them in Priddis.

The drive to Priddis was breath-taking. It didn't take long to leave the city and reach open road. The land swelled around the highway. Vast, fluid, like a waterbed mattress! The car flowed on. Office towers reduced to toys, new suburbs sprouted until they also dropped back. We passed a few tiny houses and ranches.

The land was unknown and so was my future and I was awed by it. It was one of those moments when I couldn't believe I was here and the feeling was so intense my spine was tingling. It was strange, magic and thrilling being here, seeing this, living in it rather than passing through as a tourist, my mind empty and open as the landscape around me.

My mind is so open I can't think, only feel, observe, react. I am as vast and changeable as my surroundings. A cloud appears and suddenly a brand new light slants into a valley creating wells of shadow while a side road disappears off the edge of the known world. I am only able to receive and reflect. Then, around the corner, mountains appear. As if a curtain has opened to reveal the real wizard.

Isabel and Greg live in a beautiful cedar house surrounded by woods. They have to buy special bear-proof garbage cans. They regularly see a family of deer. The house is in a clearing ringed by evergreens. Really dark at night. The house lights singled out tree trunks so that I could detect the ranks of trees standing behind the ones touched so delicately with light. The air was cold and clear, stars scattered across the sky. I haven't felt this close to night since our Orillia days. Inside the house is warm, bathed in an amber light, a sanctuary. A delicious feeling of inside-outside.

I don't know what will happen with these guys though. Isabel's life is so complicated and structured compared to mine. Right now I have no structure at all, either personally or at work. My personal life is my work life these days. Isabel herself is a strange combination of earth mother and sexual predator. She is very restless and almost military in her sense of structure, occasionally bruising in her honesty. But she is intuitive and perceptive. She says she loves Greg and the stability they have together but she is madly in lust with John Timmins.

Greg hasn't found work yet and he's ashamed of that. He's a quietly authoritarian conventional guy. Isabel says he has a jealous streak. It must be very strange for him, laid off by CP yet still surrounded by the company. Coral is Isabel's daughter from a previous relationship. Coral is Isabel's daughter from a previous relationship. Coral is only ten but she's precocious and very mature for her age. Isabel, Greg and Coral make a tough volatile triangle. Strong personalities isolated in this cottage. I wonder what will happen to them? So many fault lines. Isabel herself is conflicted enough for three people.

**

Returned on Sunday afternoon and re-filled the waterbed. Still didn't come out as well as it should have and it reminded me of one of my cock-eyed soufflés. But at least I could get sheets on the concoction. It was a big moment when I could finally move up from the basement into the bedroom. I could sleep on my own bed, burrowed in blankets. That bed had never felt so good. The smallest things, the tiniest accomplishments mean so much these days.

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Gas and utilities accounts set up.

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It's impossible to stare into a computer monitor when this band of mountains is putting on a show every morning. They're different every day, every hour. Today's mountains are covered with snow and the light is singling out individual peaks. Shadows are blue blending into the sky. On overcast days the mountains disappear as if they've just sunk into the ground. You'd never suspect there were mountains. But today they are touched by light, singing and dancing and doing a soft shoe shuffle outside the window.

I've learned since coming here that mountains are very ephemeral and changeable. They shape-shift, they disappear, they play all sorts of tricks. They follow you then drop back. The loom, lurk, play private detective. They pontificate at you and make you think of things like god. Then they almost vanish until they're a ghostly tapestry barely distinguishable from the sky.

Sept. 10

Dinner with Carol at a restaurant that resembled one you might find in Montréal. It was located in a genuinely old building with high ceilings, wood. We listened, bemused as two men discussed a business trip to Houston. Texas. We drank Traditional Ale, which you can get everywhere in Calgary. As usual the menu was full of bizarre combinations. Pasta and oysters and something called cloudberry. The city itself is a collage and so are its menus.

Boomtowns can often seem incredibly Jurassic because some parts grow faster than others. A small-town mentality, which shows everywhere from the way people sit and stand on buses to the reverence for the silly Calgary Tower, hasn't caught up with its population figures or demographics. Calgary is an adolescent city, awkward, gawky, one moment pumped up and cocky, full of itself, the next moment feeling inferior because it's not Toronto or really Texas. If I gave Calgary an age it would be nineteen. Its head swelled, releasing big-time pheromones into the air, posturing, drum-banging, not bringing the car home on time. Caught between urban and rural.

Sept. 15

Not feeling well. Got up at 3 am and was groping for Tylenol when I heard this terrible noise – something like drunken poltergeists. I tracked it to the basement and when I opened the door it sounded like a hurricane. I descended the stairs, shaking like the coward I am, to face this dreadful minotaur, which turned out to be the water heater. It had burst and the basement was flooded. The water had rushed into the basement room where I had slept. I sloshed over to a big valve and turned it. Luckily the flood stopped. Went back to bed but woke up at every sound. This is a very noisy house, constantly clunking, banging, groaning. I keep thinking I smell fried electricity.

As soon as I could I called Greg Gunhold. He was as witty and charming as ever. He gave me the name of a water heater company. They couldn't come until Monday unless I really wanted to pay an exorbitant amount of money. Greg and Sandra invited me over to spend the night but I didn't want to impose on the only two people I know in Calgary outside of work and decided I could rough it without hot water for a day.

Sept. 16

Water heater replaced. Feels good; an accomplishment. At work I heard so many stories about water heaters I now feel I've gone through a Calgary rite-of-passage.

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Very pleasant lunch with Peta Stuart. We explored the Devonian Gardens, which we both kept calling the Babylonian Gardens. This is a beautiful greenhouse sanctuary at the top of the Calgary Eaton Centre right downtown. It is an oasis of peace and best of all, there is water. I feel so dry, landlocked, all the time. The humidity from the plants is balm to my scoured skin.

**

Cable guy. Another step in setting up house. Had to pay up front. They all want cash, cheques, your Visa number over the phone before they'll do anything. It's as if every transaction here is made through the black market.

**

Sharon called! There is a world outside CP Railway. My first phone call from the world I left behind. So appropriate she should be the first caller from my old life.

Sept. 25

Went to see a movie, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, at the Uptown Theatre. The Uptown is an old repertory theatre, much like the Rialto in Montréal. There was one woman at the ticket booth and another behind the popcorn stand when I arrived. Otherwise, I was the only person in the enormous building. Canvas was draped over an old counter, chairs folded against the wall. The light was muted as if filtered through cobwebs. The theatre was vast and chill. The lack of street life in this city makes everything, even going to a movie, feel eerie. The movie wasn't bad, an outcast teenage girl story, something I can always relate to. Too many good things were left undeveloped though and the movie fizzled out for me. I don't think the director, Todd Solondz, knew whether he wanted another *Heathers* or SE Hinton. I liked *Matilda* better.

After leaving the movie I walked past this honky-tonk called Cowboy's. It advertises itself on the radio as being "the most fun you can have with your boots on" and boasts "North America's biggest Ladies' Night." Two men were brawling outside the door. A police car rounded the corner and I figured he'd be stopping there. Nope. He drove past the brawl, pulled up to me, rolled down his window and proceeded to lecture me about jaywalking.

My wrists are always being slapped here. Being new to anything automatically means you're an outlaw. Someone barked at me on the 'bus because I didn't know I had to push the doors open. A guy in Radio Shack sternly informed me that I should call an electrician, when I asked for a three-to-two adapter. I felt like the Ma Barker of electricity.

Oct. 1

First snowstorm. Gorgeous, very Christmasy. For the first time the house feels homey. There's a snowlight coming through the living room window. The floors are like rivers reflecting light. The lamps look richer, warmer. I can see evergreens from the kitchen and living room windows, dusted with snow. There have been power failures around the city and the lights were flickering here last night. Fortunately, I do know where the candles and big flashlight are.

**

Meanwhile at work ... everything has either been switched or has disappeared on me. My old computer monitor was replaced by a giant screen monitor and loaded with Windows 95, PageMaker 6, CorelDraw 6, CorelDraw in 3D, Lotus Notes. DO I have any idea why I have any of these programs (except Windows)? Do I have any clue how to use any of these programs? Are there any manuals? Today “they” came and added Microsoft Office. I was “on the list.” My back-up tapes from Windsor Station never arrived and my paper files disappeared. My giant monitor is possessed. Every time I leave it the screen starts wavering until it looks as if someone dropped it into deep water. All IS ever says is, “Press the re-set button,” which never works. I am the Woman Who Fell to Calgary, starting all over again from nothing. This is computer existentialism: Beeping and Nothingness.

I also can't figure out the enigmatic Dave Jones. For my entire work life I have developed close relationships with co-workers, even those who others find very difficult. Ivan, Terry, Jane, Véronique come to mind. Dave Jones seems completely indifferent to my presence. He cuts a very imposing figure; very stylish. Straight black coat, impeccable GQ clothes. Grey eyes, straight-edged like blades. Very cool appraising eyes. Definitely a poker-face. The little round glasses he wears makes him look like a German Expressionist or a Bauhaus guy. Isabel and I think he must be a Cancer. He's moody – frequent snapping of claws and retracting of eyeballs.

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I have the rough shape of a workroom carved out. Not as good as Stream but what is? It's been a tremendous amount of work to get this far on the room. I had to somehow fit the legs into the top of the worktable and then stand it up. The floor lamps also had to be assembled and moved. And then there were the CDs, records and books. And more books! I had to remove stack after stack of books, move, sort, transfer and shift them until I felt as if I were dragging bricks to build pyramids. Once I got bookcases placed I must have shifted every book a hundred times. But so far I've been able to figure out how to do everything myself. I was even able to hoist the TV onto its makeshift stand.

Oct. 10

I've resumed driving lessons here in Calgary. Isabel got her licence and recommended her instructor, Lyle McGratton. There's quite a large club of us non-drivers here in Calgary. Peta is another one who is driving for the first time because she and Doug bought a house in Bragg Creek and she needs to commute to work. I really enjoyed her story of the first time she had to get gas. She didn't know what she was doing "and who doesn't know what to do at a gas station?" Jennifer and Mary Helen in BIS also don't drive – or hate driving. Then there's Joan Moran who hasn't worked up the nerve to get a learner's permit yet.

Isabel tried the exam in Montréal five times before finally getting it here in Alberta. It only took her an hour and a half with Lyle. She met him in a parking lot near Gulf Canada Square. She was on her way to meet her carpool companions when she spotted a driver's ed car. She went over to speak to the guy who turned out to be Lyle. She really liked him and now she has her licence. I called Lyle. He had a slow, laid-back voice. He stressed a "no fear" approach and understands that driving lessons can be frightening. He said the ninety per cent of driving was mastering the fear and that was what he emphasized as an instructor. Sounded perfect for me and I signed up for lessons.

**

Lyle picked me up at GCS in one of those toy driver's ed cars. He is lean and lanky in tight jeans, hair curling around his chin. He has a dry droll way of speaking. It also seems like he's a jack-of-all-trades. He was an engineer and worked on the oil rigs in Russia for a while. He told stories about being a western engineer in Russia; the bribery, corruption and extortion that went on in an average business day. I didn't quite have the nerve to ask why he's now a driving instructor.

He's an excellent instructor though, patient and gentle. He never yells, never slaps my wrist with a huge pointer. He does a lot of work with high school students and I really like the compassion he has for them. He said the trick is to feel empathy and not pity.

Empathy gives you the insight into them that enables you to help them get over whatever it is they have to work out. Pity, on the other hand, doesn't help anyone. It's a dead end. When you feel sorry for someone, as opposed to knowing how they feel, you can't help them grow or go beyond the problem. I really enjoy these kinds of conversations with Lyle.

Calgary, go figure, is completely different from Montréal in terms of driving. It's also different from Ontario. There are a lot of deathcrates lurching about here, a lot of rural vehicles. There are also a lot of very large vehicles, Jimmys, jacked up trucks with mag wheels, trucks of all types, as well as large cars from the 1970s. They drive too fast and swing wide. No one keeps to their correct lane. They have crosswalks, pedestrian lights and signs but the drivers don't pay much attention to these things.

They also have playground zones where your speed is supposed to lower to 30 km/hour. I think most people see these as a joke or a challenge. They also have uncontrolled four-way intersections where there are no signs and what you do depends entirely on whether or not you have right-of-way. I find it almost impossible to know if or when I have right-of-way. There are a lot more yield signs than full stops here as well.

Driving with Lyle isn't nearly as stressful as driving with Gustavo. I'm also finally getting to see something of Calgary and have a better idea of how neighbourhoods and regions are connected. We drove down Elbow Drive through Mount Royal where I practiced hill parking. Elbow Drive gracefully curves around the Elbow River and it is very upscale. According to Lyle, the reason Calgary has these playground zones is because some rich kids were hit while crossing Elbow Drive. The residents got together, set up a memorial park and instituted playground zones throughout the city.

Much as I like Lyle I think Gustavo was more perceptive about my personal driving skills and problems. He might have been a bit brusque but he was bang on about my resistance to driving. Lyle talks about fear but on a general level, not about my particular fears or lifelong aversion to driving, and how that affects me when I'm behind the wheel. Gustavo almost immediately picked up that I really didn't want to drive.

Funny how hypnotic driving can be when you're nervous and your hands are glued to the wheel. The motion carries me along and even as I'm trying to be aware of the millions of things going on around me, the motion itself can be so soothing it puts me in a little dream world. There are some very sophisticated hand-eye skills in driving and I think it goes counter to human nature. It's too easy to just drift into the back of another car. The motion itself seems to magnetize me to the nearest object. And then of course the unsolvable problem of freezing behind the wheel.

While on the topic of cars, I've been haunting the registry, which is located in the GCS building. Here in Alberta you have to drive your car to a registry so someone can inspect the car and check its serial number. They don't make house calls, which means to get that silver UFO in the carport registered here on earth I'll have to find someone to drive the car, or sit in the car while I drive, over to a registry. Everyone here seems to be kerflummoxed by my "situation" and I'm well-known at the registry.

Oct. 11

Today at work four of us stood around a printer, scratching our heads like chimpanzees.

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Got a little interview request about the refurbishment of Locomotive No 29, which stands outside the Gulf Canada building. I talked to the supervisor at Weston Shops and heard how they had to take it apart to remove all the asbestos. They also needed a special kind of wood for the restorations. The guys at Weston had to find some "oldtimers" (senior carmen) to instruct them in how to restore such an old locomotive. Fascinating!

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Connected the computers at home. This went pretty well. All of the plugs and cables have their own shapes and only one type will fit into each socket. Even I can manage that. Why can't TVs and VCRs be designed that logically. The biggest problem was sorting the new computer accessories from the old stuff. The unpackers dumped all of the computer boxes leaving me with a jumble of cables and plugs and no idea if I had the right mouse for the new computer. A lot of crap ended up in the computer room while things like the modem ended up buried in the basement. One of the moving guys found an old punchcard of Fred's and thought it was really cool – a museum relic! The house is starting to look pretty wired with extension cords running everywhere, and I'm starting to frequent places like the House of Tools and Radio Shack.

Oct. 13

I was invited to Ralph and Anne's house for Thanksgiving dinner. I assume I was invited out of some sort of impulsive pity because I'm not exactly close to Ralph and none of my friends, Peta, Rick and Larry are going. Ralph Wilson is married to Anne Tennier, who is an engineer and director of Environmental Affairs. I have heard it's his third marriage. I accepted the invitation because I had absolutely nowhere to go on my first long weekend in Calgary, and I was curious.

Ralph picked me up because I had no other way of getting to his place. I was first to arrive and got a tour of the executive house in Douglasdale. It's a new suburb with no trees and grey houses, which are actually called "Executive Houses." It seems Ralph is really trying to show off his status.

It was easier to talk with him than I feared. He didn't say anything bizarre or mocking to me. For once we had an actual two-sided conversation. I find him a difficult person to gauge. He is deliberately unnerving and has such a desire to be the centre of attention he really isn't interested in having a conversation with anyone. There are at least two sides to his personality and he switches at the blink of an eye, and you're stranded at sea when he switches mood and you're still laughing. I have learned the hard way that there are at least two things he takes very seriously: *the CPR News* and corporate communications in general.

He is glib, flippant, quick-witted and self-destructive. He's an excellent mimic and his mind is full of pop culture references. He also spews out stereotypes the way he can spew out references to old TV shows. He can also be sadistic, putting people on the spot with remarks that can't be answered or responded to in any way. At least I can't. Dave either can't either, or has simply known him long enough to not bother. Today I saw a more normal side to Ralph. He mentioned getting his car washed at Johnny Rockets and some bargain country-western tapes he found at Walmart. He has been relocated to Calgary before (with the CPR) and knows the city quite well.

The executive house is large and full of great rooms, cathedral ceilings, ensuites; all the features real estate mavens covet. Yet Ralph is always reminiscing about the days when he had a one-room apartment. The only room in this cold new house, his workroom, looked and felt anything like Ralph. Anne seems to be Ralph's opposite in every way. She is both very professional and hospitable. It was odd seeing a suit she always wears at GCS on a heap for the laundry. We sat for a while on the patio facing the golf course until everyone else arrived.

Dave Jones and his partner, Erika Watters arrived. Ian La Couvée came with his partner, Jennifer. Ian is Information Officer with the Public Affairs group and works with Steve Morris. He resembles John Cusack but more rumpled and stoop-shouldered and every once in a while he makes me think of a young Beethoven. He works in the same pod as Dave and me. I'm glad he's there. He's easy-going, likeable and pleasantly eccentric. He's a good friend of Dave's, which relieves me of the task of trying to make conversation with Dave. Jennifer is cool, too cool for the likes of me. I bet that if we had met at Elrond or Concordia we would have been great friends.

Ken Smith arrived, wearing jeans and a bolo tie. Ken Smith is a notorious character at CPR. He must be near fifty although it is hard to tell how old a lot of these CP people are. Ken Smith has an enormous head that often breaks out in perspiration, which he mops with a handkerchief. He looks like a parody of a very proper English gentleman and his name should be "Mr Peebles." He speaks in a very ponderous old-fashioned style with an exaggerated courtesy. Véronique was fascinated by him, wouldn't hear any criticism of him.

At meetings he pontificates, rambles in an excruciatingly long-winded way. He is always manipulating people to do his work for him. Yet in social situations he's articulate, urbane and has a surprisingly ironic sense of humour about himself. Ken has known Ralph, Ian and Dave for years. He was best man at Ralph's wedding to Anne in 1992 (just a year before I started at BIS). His analyst position with Government and Industry Affairs was cut but Ralph picked him up as another writer. Ken sits on the 6th floor with the GIA people though, nowhere near the writers on the 20th, and I have no idea what he actually does.

John Timmins was also there and I kept thinking of Isabel. He is Margo Timmins's brother (Cowboy Junkies). He is lean and dark, looks like an intellectual cowboy. He's from a very wealthy family and can sometimes appear "above it all" in a little bubble of privilege. But I think that's only his manner. Sometimes we talk about books and music and he is sensitive and perceptive about those things. He is one of the CPR writers and sometimes seems exactly how a writer should be: a little unworldly, impractical, shy.

John is strangely fascinated by Ralph Wilson. In fact, he is Ralph's lackey, follows Ralph around like Cruikshank, often dressed in a ratty cardigan. He spouts Ralph's party line about how important and misunderstood corporate communications is. I don't like this lapdog side of John at all. It surprises me because John is perceptive about so many things.

Ralph seems to have a magnetic attraction for certain kinds of people, specifically people who are kind and otherwise down-to-earth. Larry Stilwell lets Ralph use him as his court jester and then there's Jon, Ken and Anne Tennier. Rick Robinson and Peta are somehow able to remain detached. Especially Rick. I can't figure out Dave's relationship with Ralph. On the one hand they're old drinking buddies but Dave is too cautious to be pinned down either way about Ralph. They hang around together but Dave has commented on "Ralph's abuse," and he, along with all the rest of us, wonder what on earth Anne sees in him. How can they be a couple?

We sat down to a Thanksgiving dinner Anne had prepared, as traditional as you could imagine. Dave sat beside me. We were chummy all afternoon and evening so I guess that means he doesn't hate me. Later we ended up in the rec room. Ralph lapsed into a melancholy mood and started playing his father's 68 rpm records.

Some wonderful music. Billie Holliday's "Strange Fruit." Lots of big band music, jazz standards, country-western-folk and even some Appalachian ballads. Then we started to dance. We danced with each other, by ourselves, in a group. We roistered the way Val and I did last New Year's Eve. Dave was nuzzling Erika, Ian swayed behind the bar, Jennifer and I were dancing together. Ken Smith swished around the room lighting Ralph's cigarettes. Meanwhile Ralph continued playing the role of Satanic conductor, playing records, swinging a baton at us. He looked downright Luciferian in the dim light. It was one of the strangest evenings I can ever remember. It was as if someone had cast a spell on all of us. No emotional or physical connection between us whatsoever, yet we were all in the same strange mood. All except Anne, patiently waiting for us to leave.

The thought of seeing them all on Monday, reinstated behind their computer monitors was so weird. But then everything is so weird these days. I long for some normal human companionship. How long has it been since I last had a good talk with a real friend? At least all I did was dance and didn't start crying. Maybe we all felt exactly the same way; displaced and homesick.

Oct. 14

Another Thanksgiving dinner, this time with Isabel and Greg in Priddis. Drove out with John Timmins. So cool reclining in his sports car listening to great music. Once again I found myself gaping in awe at the huge open sky-land, hills cracking open to reveal softly looming mountains. John's our resident superstar. Next week he's going to LA to play in a concert with Neil Young, with the Cowboy Junkies, of course.

So many sides to Isabel. She can be honest to the point being rude. She's a very inquisitive person, always asking questions but unlike most people, she remembers what you tell her. In spite of some of the things she blurts out she's actually very sensitive, perceptive and intuitive. I never know who to feel sorrier for, the person who has received one of her blasts or Isabel herself who always feels terrible after putting her foot in her mouth.

She also has a corporate side to her personality. When I mentioned a relocation article I'm writing she reacted in a disconcertingly CP-esque way, going on about corporate image and possible libel suits! I also don't like dealing with her at BIS. She's almost unbearably officious at her work. But there's yet another side to Isabel, my favourite side of her. She has a restless, seeking, almost romantic quality. We went for a long walk in the woods, which was lovely, except Isabel is a little too martial on these walks. It was John who eventually sat down for a break, reclining in a languorous manner. He was easy and playful with baby Daphne. Isabel's lust for John reached fever-pitch by dinner time. She and I drank way too much red wine. Greg disappeared with Daphne. Before John and I left Isabel urged me to tell him she was crazy about him and to find out if he felt the same for her. Then she urged me to call her as soon as I got home.

A long dark drive home. I couldn't tell John what Isabel wanted me to. Instead I tried working up to it by asking how they knew each other and for how long, etc. John was cagey. He answered my questions without revealing any feelings about Isabel. In face, John was far more interested in talking about Ralph Wilson. I don't know how to tell her I think he's just playing with her. I called her when I got home, just as I had promised. Greg answered and was very rude to me.

A little later Isabel called and we had a long conversation. She told me she called John and said some things she shouldn't have and that he reacted coolly. We talked about all kinds of things: Tarot, astrology, sex. She's had sex with a lot of men and said Greg hates her past. He's possessive. That explains his patriarchal manner when I called. I guess he thinks I'm some kind of go-between, or that I'm leading her astray? Isabel then told me that she's bisexual and there are times when she thinks I'm "ravishingly beautiful."

Life in Calgary.

Oct. 17

Driving lesson with the redoubtable Lyle. He really is a lovely man. Long angular face, hazel eyes, bony nose. Strong scent to him, not quite patchouli, more like eucalyptus. I think of it as "Eau de Lyle." He is one of these men who sees himself as a compassionate, spiritual person without realizing how sarcastic he really is. He's always smoking, chewing gum, drinking Coke, scarfing down junk food.

We passed a grim line of anti-abortion demonstrators on Heritage Drive. As dour a group of people I've ever ever seen. They looked like a row of dolmens. So many men. I mentioned to Lyle that I'd never actually seen one of these demonstrations before and it seemed so American to me. We started talking about the bible and how unchristian it is to play god and judge, as these demonstrators are doing. I also can't imagine how grim and your life must be to spend a lovely autumn day doing this.

Went to Bowness to practice drive. This is where the exam will take place. Bowness is one of the tiny towns that were incorporated into Calgary and it has a reputation for being poor and rough. I recognize it now as being the area I was cab-jacked to. Main street with a pawn shop, interfaith thrift store and a vacuum cleaner store.

Practiced hill and parallel parking. Did my best through uncontrolled intersections, odd forks in the road. Lyle spent most of the time talking about his finances and mutual funds. He also said he was planning to give up the driving school and open a business washing people's dogs. A man of many hats: driving instructor-financial advisor-dog washer. Isabel did mention he's a Gemini.

Oct. 20

Two hour session in preparation for the driving exam. Lyle was quiet today. While I careened about in the car he drew pictures of houses and roofs. He is now going into the roofing business for a while. Engineer-driving instructor-financial advisor-dog washer-roofer. Quite the renaissance man.

Oct. 23

Frustrating day at work. Sometimes GCS just feels like being in Purgatory. Even for me this is bizarre and existential, a cosmic joke. But at the end of the day Peta invited me to an annual report design show and I returned feeling inspired. I still have something inside me, something I can draw on. Right now there are so many things I want to do: design a homepage, create a hypertext novel. It would be wonderful if I could create something like the creative, innovative report designs I saw, lines of text shimmering in fonts I played with this afternoon. Never mind Dave Jones and his damned Helvetica. Nothing is stopping me from learning on my own and anything I learn is what I'll be able to offer to the next job.

Peta loves her field, graphic art and is so receptive to new ideas. She knows CP and CP clientele very well and always tries to slip something new or innovative into whatever project she's working on. She's curious about the world, open and adventurous about trying new things and about her work. We are good allies and I am so thankful she is here.

Fascinated by the merging of graphics and text. The use of symbol, metaphor, impression and memory in advertising is fascinating. Good copy works on much the same level poetry does, and so do images. It was interesting to see how many annual reports have borrowed advertising techniques with seductive sophisticated graphics. I think *Wired* has hugely influenced the graphics world with its fluorescent colours and woozy closeup photographs, the greens and oranges and different fonts and sizes.

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Voyaged into work. Takes such a long time to get to the 20th floor. Some of the people who work on the Gulf floors of the building are real characters; oilmen and engineers. Unlike prissy CPR they wear jeans on Friday. They're a much more gregarious bunch than we are and seem to take up a lot of space on the elevator. These big oil guys couldn't care less about social distance. Walked past BIS, lingering to talk to Jennifer, Mary Helen and Diana Thomas. Great group there. Then through the passageway opening into my little kingdom, the mountains appearing through the window, flushed with pink, a river of light coming in from the west. Night lights are still on, like stars, extending to the end of the known world. Every day this window astounds me, gives me hope.

Upon my arrival Peta sprang out from behind her cabinet, wished me "happy birthday" and kissed me on both cheeks (sigh). Larry and Rick brought out a cake for me. I love this group. They are nice, good people. No shadows, no enigmas, no ambivalence, no nastiness, no Jekyll and Hyde mood swings. Then I found a card propped up on my keyboard. This was one to keep. Everyone wrote things like "Happy first birthday in Calgary." Dave wrote, "Have a good one you old cowgirl, you." Carol wrote, "Happy birthday to a courageous person." I really appreciated that comment. Isabel gave me a beautiful blue willow pendant.

Carol and Isabel took me to the River Café for a birthday dinner. The restaurant is on Prince's Island near Eau Claire market. It is lovely; amber light, fireplace, huge windows so you can look out at a winter wilderness from a warm sanctuary. We sat by the fireplace, drank red wine and talked about Gerry, Fred, Greg, John Timmins and of course, precocious Coral, with whom Isabel is engaged in battle. Outside the window an island of snow, trees dusted in white.

Returned home to a package from Fred. He sent me a beautiful coat from my favourite artisan store in Vieux Montréal. It is charming and feels warm and luxurious, but best of all it evokes Montréal to me. The most perfect gift imaginable for me right now. Maybe he does still care.

Nov. 3

Carol called and we went out for dinner. We cruised down the Macleod Trail in Carol's car and decided to go to the Ranchman's, reputed to have the best Alberta beef in the province. Both her real estate agent and Greg mentioned the place. We thought we'd soak up some Alberta ambience. I think the prospect of finding some nice older rancher also appealed to Carol. We entered and discovered a benefit in full swing. It looked like a *Dallas* set, people milling around dressed to the nines. About half of the crowd was dressed in the usual high society dresses and suits. The rest were decked out in full western regalia. The western outfits were every bit as expensive, formal and status-conscious as tuxes. We learned the benefit was for a battered woman's shelter.

We bagged ourselves a slab of beef and sat watch the auction. Carol and I couldn't believe we were in Alberta, listening to an auctioneer, surrounded by rich cowboys. The auctioneer was the real thing, babbling away in ecstatic glossolalia. Showgirls brought out all the coveted objects. It's interesting what auctions do – how they play on your emotions. Things I wouldn't otherwise look at all of a sudden became interesting as soon as the bidding began. If it looked as if something wasn't getting a high enough bid I'd feel sorry for the object and want to place a bid on it just so it wouldn't be left out.

Women discreetly held their paddles up, close to their chests, expressions of concentration on their faces. Many of the men were showy about their bids, loud, boisterous, attracting attention to themselves. I wonder if it's due to male competition or if it's simply because men are more used to having money they can display. The big ticket items at the auction were all sports packages. Hockey pilgrimages and ski trips went for huge prices and the men who won acted as if they had accomplished something other than just bidding high.

When the auction ended we were treated to a line dancing demonstration. I found it ritualistic and sexless. The women looked like the Stepford Line Dancers with eerily plastic smiles performing their motions like they were fulfilling requirements for a gymnastics routine. The flipping of the skirts was timed to the nano-second.

The couples stepped in, out, back, forth, rotated, heeled and toed, bowed and twirled like little wind-up toys. And there was no sensuality. No glimmer of attraction or even affection between any of them. They were all performing alone, only requiring a partner to fulfill the compulsory part of their exercise. Carol said it was very American and it was just like the 1950s. All those Bandstand shows with dancers doing the jitterbug, etc, were exactly like this. She then said, “Would you have believed a year ago we’d end up at the Ranchman’s in the heartland of Alberta?” Nope. Never saw this coming!

Nov. 4

Lyle stood me up. I was supposed to undergo a driving exam today but he did not show up for our 5:00 appointment. Hung around GCS until I finally packed it in and caught the 6:00 bus. When I got home and tried to call him I discovered his phone number was disconnected. So was his page number. His driving school, LRM, isn’t in the phone book. He doesn’t owe me any money – he was scrupulous about that. I have put way too much time, energy and money to give up now but the thought of cold-calling driving schools out here in privatization-land is less than appealing.

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Fine light fairy snow. Every twig outlined as if emitting its own light. A weeping birch looks ethereal, a ghostly penitent fading into the luminous blue-grey sky. It’s a crystal night, lustrous sky and snow, trees that could chime in their frozen delicacy. My neighbourhood feels as remote as Tibet or Shangri-La Valley, high up in the clouds where everything is radiant.

Nov. 14

Clinton re-elected. Two years ago it didn't seem possible to me. Our trip to Florida occurred when the Republicans had taken over the House, Gingrich was coming on strong and all we heard about was crime and punishment, welfare queens and so many conspiracies. Clinton seemed to be a lame duck president, attacked from all sides. I was so worried about politics and was afraid Gingrich himself could become president in 1996, as there don't seem to be so many checks and balances any more and Bob Dole was not a strong candidate. But Clinton has been re-elected and Gingrich is sinking into the sewer of his own scandals. Some of the nasty rhetoric has calmed down. Feels like a reprieve more than a victory but I'll take it.

**

Snow storm. It has been snowing and snowing and snowing. Peta couldn't make it back to Bragg Creek and asked if she could spend the night at my place. We had a very pleasant evening. She took me out to dinner at Earl's. She was being too generous and I felt bad because all I had to offer was my bed with sheets that haven't been washed in a while or an old couch set up in the basement (but came with clean sheets). But she needed to pay me back. Ah, the politics of new relationships and situations. There's no comfort zone with anyone, no person or place with whom I can go without feeling I have to pay back, negotiate or apologize for some reason or another. Nothing is accepted, understood or unconditional. Obviously this is a brand new situation for Peta.

After dinner we walked to a camera store opening. The city looked amazing in the snow. The streets were deserted and we were walking west of downtown. The head offices disappeared so quickly it was as if they never existed. We approached railway tracks buried in the snow and just ahead of us, an old armoury building that stood like a castle. Snow blurred the world. Cold, too; cold dry Calgary air. The city felt like a railway depot at the turn of the century. It was easy to imagine being an immigrant, someone who had just disembarked from a Colonist train.

In Montréal you can see the old factories and mercantile buildings fading to lichen. You can hear your feet echoing on the cobblestones of Old Montréal, touch the stately ships at the port. You can immerse your eyes in the textures of old wood and stone, the writing on the walls. Here in Calgary there are not the same cues to the past. I can imagine being a pioneer, a settler, my first view of the railway town, first glimpse of mountains, coping with the first harsh winter. There is nothing to see, only the blur of snow, ice crystals in the air, the railway tracks, the armoury building at the end of the street. Utter stillness.

Peta and I made it to the camera store and met up with Rick, his partner Christine and Larry. Always a pleasant group. Later we made our way to the LRT through the snow and wind, making jokes about being the Franklin Expedition. This was probably the most fun I've had since arriving. Peta spent the night on the basement couch. She got up early and shovelled my sidewalk, looking indomitable in her winter coat.

Nov. 15

Went to the CP Railway relocation party at the Palliser Hotel, a sumptuous old CP hotel with high ceilings, gilt-edged mirrors, polished wood and marble surfaces, deep rich carpets. Stately chairs with striped upholstery. Niches, corners, snugs. Easy to imagine the Palliser during gold rush days, winking with rhinestone tie clips, sealskin coats, the rustling of long crinoline skirts, peoples with bellboys, valets, maids, stillroom girls. Dave Jones slapped a name tag on me. We hung around for the rest of the evening and sat beside each other at the dinner. Comfortable and companionable. The wine steward was the best I've ever encountered. The level in the glasses never sank below an inch. We were all presented with lovely pewter paperweights with Larry's design of Locomotive 29 engraved on them. The table settings were little maquettes of trains going through tunnels.

After dinner Rick and Rob Parent from Archives wanted to steal a place setting. I thought they were joking so I joined in on the caper. The three of us picked up maquettes and were busted by hotel security. Rick surprised me. He really wanted his maquette, stuck a napkin over it and walked out the front door, past the security guard who frisked Bob and me. The evening went on from there. Debbie-Lyne Guerin, Bob Parent and I sang Eagles songs in the lobby. Ian La Couvée grew quiet and moody then disappeared.

We all moved into the salon where the corporate muckety-mucks were hanging out. Ralph Wilson hobnobbing with Rob Ritchie, the veeps and assorted grand fromages. But the singing and roistering continued. Mike Kieran, who was just appointed director of something-or-other, led us in a chorus of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." We sang Vera Lynn songs, more Eagles, the Beatles. It was getting on the two a.m and more and more suits joined us.

Dave, Brent Harlton and I went on a search and rescue mission to find Ian, who had disappeared somewhere in the hotel. We found him. Brent stayed with him and Dave and I returned to the reception hall. In the corner, President and CEO Ritchie was holding court, surrounded by some attentive young women. Dave didn't figure they were discussing intermodal transportation.

Eventually I found myself beside Rob Ritchie in a small group. Bob Parent led us all in a few choruses of "Alouette," complete with hand gestures. Bob was putting on a "habitant show" and it was so strange. Dave said he's been at CPR for twenty-four years and has never seen anything this bizarre. The whole night actually reminded me of one of my parents' parties. If lampshades had been available someone would have worn one.

Dave and I went upstairs to Ralph's hotel room. No, I do not know why Ralph rents a room at the Palliser. It was very late and anyone left had had a lot to drink. Ralph was sitting on the bed beside one of Rob Ritchie's young groupies and he was ordering her to read the CPR News. When she said she never read it, Ralph demanded to know if she was illiterate. As soon as Debbie-Lyne and Mike Kieran left to get a taxi I broke cover and followed them. Dave joked about how I now have the ultimate in job security. Rob Ritchie calls me into his office to fire me and all I have to do is sing a few bars of "Alouette." I don't think I have ever spent a more bizarre evening - and that includes Elrond.

Nov. 18-24

This week's driving school fiasco: Lyle never did return and I went to the registry hoping they could recommend a driving school. They did and I made an appointment. The instructor never showed up. When I called, the receptionist wasn't even apologetic. No excuses were made. When she asked if she could make another appointment for me I said, "I really don't think so."

Browsed through the Yellow Pages and called Young Drivers of Canada because I had heard of them. I made the mistake of mentioning what happened with Lyle. All of a sudden the man I was talking to lost all interest in teaching me how to drive. A PI personality seemed to take control of his body. He wanted to know who Lyle was and all about his driving school. When I told him, the man rapped out that he had never heard of LRM. Then he said, "I want to get my hands on him." I hung up as quickly as possible, afraid I was caught in a black market driving school industry. I pictured dark alleys, machine guns in violin cases, tiny cars with driving school logos screeching through the city. Privatization definitely has its down side.

Finally found the AMA (Alberta Motor Association), made an appointment and felt pleased with myself for not having given up at this point. I descended to the GCS lobby and waited for a "Chuck Penny" (likely not his real name since he is involved with a Calgary driving school). No one showed up. I went to a lobby pay phone, listened to the muzak version of "You're Having My Baby" until I was connected with someone from the alleged driving school. I was pretty pissed off at this point and said I was a CPR transferee and that there were 900 of us with spouses and teenaged children who could conceivably be in the market for driving lessons.

The magic letters "CPR" got me transferred to the driving school's director who personally took over my file, refunded me for the missed appointment and gave me a two hour free lesson. It turned out to be an honest mistake. Chuck Penny did show up – at my house. The receptionist hadn't noted the GCS pick-up location. Finally connected with him for my first lesson. Looks like the AMA will be strict like the Montréal City Motor League.

Penny teaches parallel parking Montréal-style: confusing, spatially impossible, too idiotic to ever do in real life. Also without the faintest whiff of humour. According to Mr Penny I'm not ready for the exam. Who am I supposed to believe? I already feel like a walking CPR ATM machine for every two-bit entrepreneur in town. One look at my business card and cash registers go off in people's eyes.

**

I surrender. I wave a white flag in the weather forecaster's general direction. It's -28 here, the house is sinking under a tide of snow. No cars on the Macleod Trail – only ice breakers. There are ice flows on the Bow River (the creek that dares call itself a river) and glaciers are moving in from Moraine Lake. People are looking up at the sky for signs of a chinook. Apparently, if the moon has a dark ring in the middle it means a chinook is on the way. So does boiling eye of newt on Friday the 13th. Besides, no one could have seen the moon in a week because the sky is dense with snow.

Steve Morris, who transferred from Vancouver, didn't even make it into work. He loves way out in Bearspaw and we didn't know it he was on the way, overturned in a ditch or gobbled by a grizzly. We're all living such new, precarious and unpredictable lives these days and we actually worry when someone doesn't make it to work.

Lights are flickering in the house. I panic over the possibility of a power failure. I know where the candles are but I don't have matches or a lighter. I also have no sense of what is normal and what is actually wrong with the house. I hear howling noises outside the kitchen door and hope it's a dog or even a coyote and some kind of prairie banshee. Should I be handling something here? The onset of winter really makes the house feel like terra incognita. Will the furnace hold out?

**

Morning has broken. At these temperatures it would have to break. When I woke up it was -32, not counting the wind chill. I packed some pemmican, munched on a bar of whale blubber and began the arduous journey out of the house., bundled up like Dr Fleischman on Northern Exposure.

I saw a woolly mammoth dive into a fur coat store. The sasquatches have all booked tickets to Florida and the abominable snowman is waving at me over cocktails. From the GCS window the city looks like an arctic Mordor, mountains ghostly in the background, roofs and streets white, smoke hanging in the air.

Nov. 28

Today's Driving Fiasco. Latest installment in a never-ending series. As soon as the temperature soared above -30 I rescheduled another driving exam. There had been a fresh snowfall but short of waiting for August, there wasn't much I could do. I walked down to 17th Ave and caught a bus to take me to the outer reaches of Siberia where driving schools cluster. To get to the exam I crossed the tundra, the sun skating on the foothills. The AMA driving school is far southwest. Today's examiner looked like a skier. He took me through the circuit, like an equestrian routine. I duly paused at the uncontrolled intersection, slowed at the school zone, tried to get myself to speed up to show I had seen the "End School Zone" sign. The car was high-strung and skittish. It bounced, crunched and slid through the strata snow on the street. Calgary doesn't plow its residential streets.

I turned right on a red light with a "No Right Turn" sign dangling in front of me. All in all I committed four offences, then we turned down a semi-busy residential street. The speed limit rose and I carefully adjusted my speed while trying to stay in the ruts to keep from sinking into a ditch. Suddenly I was cut off by a police car, which proceeded to stop. The police car had to stop because it was blocked by an ambulance. A second ambulance loomed in my mirror. The street, not wide to begin with, was even narrower due to snowbanks. I glanced to the left and saw an occupied stretcher pass. And then, on my right side, a small child ran out in front of the car!

The driver's ed guy hadn't even seen the child. I wrenched the steering wheel, executed 1½ turns, went up over the sidewalk (deliberately this time!) and stopped in someone's yard. Turned out this was the right decision. The driving guy, who was really embarrassed because he hadn't seen the little boy, was impressed. He said I had excellent reflexes and instinct.

He also said he had never had anything like this happen before in his experience as a driver or instructor. He said he couldn't pass me because of my previous unpardonable sins but he noted all the things I had done right in an extraordinary situation. I returned to work shaking and licenceless, visions of accidents and ambulances dancing through my head.

Nov. 30

Hauled myself out of bed early this morning to return to Outer Mongolia for more driving torture. It was pure, sheer duty or tenacity that moved me. Today's driving instructor had seen the form filled out by the previous examiner detailing the events that occurred on my last exam. I drove around, performing my obligatory manoeuvres to the best of my ability. The instructor didn't touch his form until we returned to the parking lot, where he took off a couple of deductions. Result: I now have a Class 5 Alberta driver's licence, and there's only one thing to say to that. Yeeee Hah!

It wasn't an easy thing to accomplish. The process felt like something out of Greek mythology, or maybe a Grimm fairytale. I could only get this official stamped parchment after descending to Hades, confronting minotaurs, cleaning out the Augean stables. Best of all, no more little Hitlers in tiny vehicles with their endless forms and clipboards. Spent the rest of the afternoon prowling along 17th Ave feeling like a 16 year-old who doesn't have to get the car back by 10:00.

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Fell into a strange little time warp, as if a curtain had been pulled back and I was glimpsing a previous incarnation. I was listening to CKUA and someone started talking about Lord Somerled. I'll never know exactly who he was because I was transported to rue Somerled in Montréal so vividly I could see the brown brick of our first apartment, the lantern at the entrance, could feel the sidewalk beneath my feet, the leaves of the old trees lining the street. Montréal still so much more physically, sensually real for me. I'm still more there than here.

Dec. 13

CPR Christmas party held at Stampede Centre. Sat beside Dave at a table with Ian, Jennifer, Erika, Brent Harlton and Roly. Had a good long talk with Jennifer. She confided in me about her brother who is a schizophrenic, and also about how she doesn't make friends easily. She also said she feels sorry for me, having to work with Dave. She considers Dave a friend but said he's strange and moody. The exact words Peta used to describe Dave. "He's a strange guy, very moody." Jennifer knows a lot about the department through Ian and wouldn't want to be in my position. I said a little more about work than I wanted to but feel I can trust both her and Ian. I had a feeling I would really like Jennifer.

Later, Ralph rounded us up at a table near the dance floor. He made a rude gesture at me with a chocolate Santa and I pretended to be prudish and disgusted, since I didn't see any other way of playing that situation. I've decided the only safe way around Ralph is to pretend I'm just as naïve, gullible and earnest as my predecessor, Lucy Payette. The move has happened. I have to stick it out for two years.

Ralph danced with Anne but there was nothing sincere about it. He was mocking John Travolta and playing to his entourage. Anne looked radiant. No one in the department knows how she can put up with him. Carol, always good for gossip, told me that Ralph was the first person who ever showed interest in going out with Anne. But she is so down-to-earth, successful and accomplished compared to him. She is director of Environmental Affairs at CPR and is truly achieving success in this male-dominated corporation.

Ken Key and Ian Martin praised me for the "Clear the Tracks" rap song I wrote for one of Peta's projects. I think I scored big time with that song and it came so easily. I danced with Dave and left with him and Erika in a taxi. It occurs to me I have never taken so many taxis in my life as I have in these last three months.

Dec. 14

Took the Mothership for a big grocery run, which meant my first solo left turn off Macleod Trail. It's closing in on Christmas and the Co-op parking lot was chaotic, cars jumbling in and out, people and carts everywhere. I bought the groceries, stashed them into the car then panicked. I still have a tendency to turn the wrong way while backing up and the lot was full and chaotic. I debated leaving the car there and coming back for it later when most of the other cars were gone. I went back into the store, went into the bathroom then returned to the car, breathed in, out, turned the engine on. My mission: Get out of the Co-op parking lot alive. I obviously made it. Or I would still be in the parking lot and not writing about it in this journal.

Dec. 21

Blast from the past today. The phone rang and it was Terry Byrnes. He wants to publish "Restructured" in *Matrix* magazine. He was in a good mood, asked me how I was doing and gave me his phone and email numbers. I told him how my moods swing constantly between exhilaration and loneliness to the point where it seems bottomless. He said, "I'll bet" with such sympathy and conviction I felt like sobbing. I've always sensed an underground sympathy, or maybe an understanding, between him and me. I also think something about my Calgary story, possibly the idea of searching for a better life, pushes a few of his buttons.

I remember one of our last thesis meetings. We talked about that fateful first workshop and when I was leaving to return to work I had said, "I don't usually try getting my professors fired." He replied with an odd smile on his face. "Who knows what would have happened if you had succeeded. Maybe my life would be better." His stories in *Wintering Over* dealt very much with that theme.

He wants to see more background on me as a writer in "Restructured." Wants me to "come clean" about my past jobs and how they're related to my writing. He also wants to see, in the piece, how the new job is related to writing. To be honest, I haven't thought much about writing since the thesis. And I haven't had much choice about my job situation.

I told him that when I first noodled around writing the piece there was more in it about choosing not to have a corporate career and how I preferred the lifestyle I have now. A job that made me enough money to afford an apartment, and the freedom to do other things, such as taking classes and, yes, writing. But I took it out because I hadn't liked the tone. It jarred with the rest of the piece, I thought. When he asked why, I had to think about it for a while, as I often do when he asks these impersonal/personal questions.

I said that in these days of downsizing and lay-offs I felt I was coming across as a "bad winner," kind of an ingrate. He assured me that I hadn't sounded like that anywhere in the piece and that the prevailing tone was one of generosity. He said the writing theme should be added and then said I had the ability – as if my self-doubt about writing prevented me from including it. He may be right about that.

He said my images came from everywhere, old TV shows, literary reference, song lyrics and that they're usually "right on the mark." I said CP had never seen that kind of style before and it had an impact. Again he said in all sincerity, "I'll just bet." Then he said that as far as he was concerned I'm a writer. I'm a writer without qualifying it in any way. Wow. What has happened? After all those years of being damned with faint praise (or maybe it was the opposite), all of the ambivalence, qualifying remarks and back-handed compliments I have received huge validation from Terry Byrnes. These are words I longed to hear a long time ago. Only now, here in Calgary, I finally hear them. Or ... maybe he has been saying it all along and I never heard it until now.

Dec. 22

Fred. Went to the airport to meet him. There he was, a voice on the phone made flesh. It felt so much like the old Elrond days I was overwhelmed and completely inarticulate with emotion. I kept picturing him at the door of 910, how I felt when I realized he wasn't returning to see Val. Wild night, lunar landscape outside the taxi window. I've been living with the weirdness of a first Calgary winter for weeks now. He's just plummeted down into the middle of it.

When we reached the house he rattled around in it like a guest – or ghost. He was surrounded by all of our furniture and household items, the same dishes, tables, chairs, books, etc, in completely unfamiliar surroundings. His apartment in Montréal is temporary and the Calgary address is his official “home” and business address yet he has only seen this house once, briefly in June, and it feels like a lifetime ago. He kept repeating how weird he felt in the house. Well, it had been pretty strange for me rattling around in his apartment that last week in Montréal.

We had a nice first night and merry little Christmas. We worked on the house re-did some of the wild wiring, grounded electrical outlets. Did a lot of driving, grateful to have someone beside me in the car. We had more than a few fights in the car but from what I hear from Isabel, nothing out of the ordinary.

One thing I have discovered is how ordinary I really am. I am not helpless or particularly impractical. I’m not incompetent (an abuse-word if there ever was one). The house has not fallen to rack and ruin. I’m getting by the same as any other transferee here and unlike most others I’m doing it alone. This is an incredibly liberating thing to find out about myself. I am strong enough to live alone, which is how I thought my life would be. I wanted to live as a single woman in an urban setting. I wanted to show all this to Fred. I wanted to be the guide and show him what I know of Calgary. I arranged an outing at Peta’s, a dinner with Greg and Sandra and a New Year’s soirée at the River Café.

We had a great time with Greg and Sandra at Chianti’s. Over wine and pasta dinner we exchanged work and travel stories. Greg is as hilarious and outrageous as ever. Sandra is also very bright and humorous. She is also very sweet. She said that women are always far more ambivalent about relocating to a new city, we find it harder to adjust and think more about what we left behind than men. We talked about our travels. Greg hated England. He said London was fun but anywhere else in the country made him want to nuke the place. He hates incompetence. Sandra says she enjoys eccentrics more than Greg so she didn’t find it as bad. I mentioned how much more at home I felt after crossing the border from the Netherlands into Belgium. “Yeah,” said Greg. “All of a sudden there was a run-down farm and it was dusty in the distance. What a relief.”

Sandra and Greg told me to call them any time I felt like having dinner or just hanging out with them. They never call people because of their jobs and they don't extend invitations to very many of their clients. Greg said Sandra had wanted to scoop me up and take me home on the day I arrived in Calgary. My first real friends in Calgary – who aren't Montréal transferees.

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Visited Isabel and Greg in Priddis. They were in full-scale Christmas commotion. Greg's daughters from a previous marriage were there. Coral was challenging both her parents. Baby Daphne roared from her chair. Isabel spent most of the time working on jigsaw puzzle with one of the girls. Fred and Greg talked about cars. I'm glad my life isn't as complicated as Isabel's. She seems distracted all the time and it's easy to see why.

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Went on a drive through Calgary. I wanted to explore Inglewood and we got lost in a maze of side streets. Frigid day. Bleak. We ended up at the railway yards. The gas station we stopped at could have been somewhere in Alaska. Once again, with the snow whipping around us I had the strong feeling we were so much farther north than we really are. A few lonely houses stood like wind-breakers. Trucks pulling in and out of the station. Downtown Inglewood looks like something out of Klondike days. The buildings are square, built for endurance, many a dark yellow. I still can't get over the sharp contrasts in this city. The wild west scene is right on 9th Ave, so close to the downtown core. You'd never believe downtown could be as close as it is.

Kensington Ave was deserted in the extreme cold. Boutique lights melting over the snowbanks. Had dinner at the Kensington Divino's, which made me feel like we were two forlorn travellers mysteriously entering an Italian villa at the centre of the Arctic circle. We had a pleasant dinner and good talk.

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Peta's winter rumble in Bragg Creek. Still brutally cold. I know how to get to Isabel's but Peta is farther out and their map is full of small landmarks. Stop signs where you turn right; T-intersections where you turn left, pass a bed-and-breakfast, etc etc. She and Doug are really out in the country, snow-dusted evergreens, oceans of snow, icy roads, deep ditches. We passed a van overturned in a ditch and then another van that was only stuck. Someone put up a little sign with orange letters that said "Slow down!"

Peta is such a gracious host and I was so happy to see that all the nice people had come. No Ralph. Rick Robinson was there with Christine, his two daughters and his mother. This must be the nicest family I have ever met. Harold Kunze was there with his wife, daughter and son. Another lovely family group. His wife is working on her MA and we had a fun talk about grad school. We all reminisced about Montréal, exchanged Calgary and moving-day stories. I worried that Fred would feel excluded because he wasn't "one of us." Yet. He's in such a strange position. He is a transferee, the relocation has disrupted his life too; he just hasn't actually moved yet.

Fred and I both found it strange exchanging stories about Westmount Moving, the packers and unpackers. I found it difficult to remember that my move wasn't unique, that it's been shared on a collective level. Fred was startled to see Peta lighting a candle with a wooden CP match, from the same book of matches I have. We were all given packages of these matches that we smuggled into Alberta. Just another tiny thing that bound us together, that has turned us into some kind of colony. We share the same stories, the same company mementos, the same nostalgia for Montréal and our old lives and many of the same impressions of Calgary. There is an "us and them" mentality because at this point, we're still the only people who understand each other. Fred isn't with us yet.

I suspect Fred did feel left out because while we were gathered at the dining room table talking about the unpacking process he suddenly and very confrontationally asked me what happened to a tiny glass ornament that couldn't have been worth more than a dollar. I was very hurt by this, and insulted. I saw the furniture come in, the flood of stuff, had washed and placed and set up every single item in that house and he saw fit to embarrass me in front of my favourite co-workers over a tiny glass thing lost in a huge cross-country move.

Peta noticed. She is so intuitive and sensitive. She didn't say anything, only flashed me a look of sympathy, then told me later that she and Doug had ended up in a more embarrassing situation when they were together on a ski trip, again with CP colleagues. She said it might be relocation syndrome. The spouses, especially the men, feel excluded and probably more powerless than they've ever been in their lives.

There was no connection between Fred and me at Peta's, no warmth, no affection as there is between Dave Jones and Erika. No special glances. Yet our years together showed once during the visit. We played Pictionary. Fred and I were partners and it almost killed me to see how closely our minds worked together while playing the game, the way he could always figure out what my drawings represented.

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Fred and I spent New Year's Eve at the River Café. At the time I was sure he would like it, but I have no idea how he felt about it. The very next day a chinook came reeling in. A genuine chinook, a very powerful wind that seems to suck the snow up like a Hoover. Real chinooks are amazing forces of nature. I've never experienced anything like this back east. Jennifer at BIS says chinooks cause violent mood swings in her, much the same as PMS.

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The visit went from awkward to awful. On the last night of his visit he hurt me so badly I'm not sure if I'll ever recover. He claimed, in a voice dripping with prissy disgust, the kitchen wasn't clean because I hadn't put shelf-liners in the cupboards and because the light fixtures were dusty. I guess the maid had been too busy cleaning the rest of the house to get to shelf-liners and light fixtures. Seemed to me that learning a brand new full-time job in a brand new city, taking driving lessons and having to do all household chores and errands, such as grocery runs, might have higher priority.

I know now there is nothing I can do that will be good enough. He also attacked me using language straight from the verbal abuse play-book. “What kind of books do you read? Don’t you ever learn anything from them? Haven’t you figured anything out?” He sounded like an asshole in a movie, reading from a really bad script. But I have changed, I know I won’t collapse without him. Right now I hope he doesn’t move here next spring.

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